So why is it we're going through the Giant's Forest?
Giant's Forest
No Solicitors
Because beyond it is the Cave of No Return.
Riiiight. And we would ever want to go there because...?
Dude. Weren't you paying attention to the old man who tipped us off?
Just indulge me.
Within the Cave of No Return lies the Armor of Invincibility. Duh.
Wait. If it's a Cave of No Return, then how does anyone know what's inside of it?
Well where would you suggest they put a suit of mystical Armor of Invincibility?
OK, Chuckles. From now on, I pick the adventures.
Phooey.

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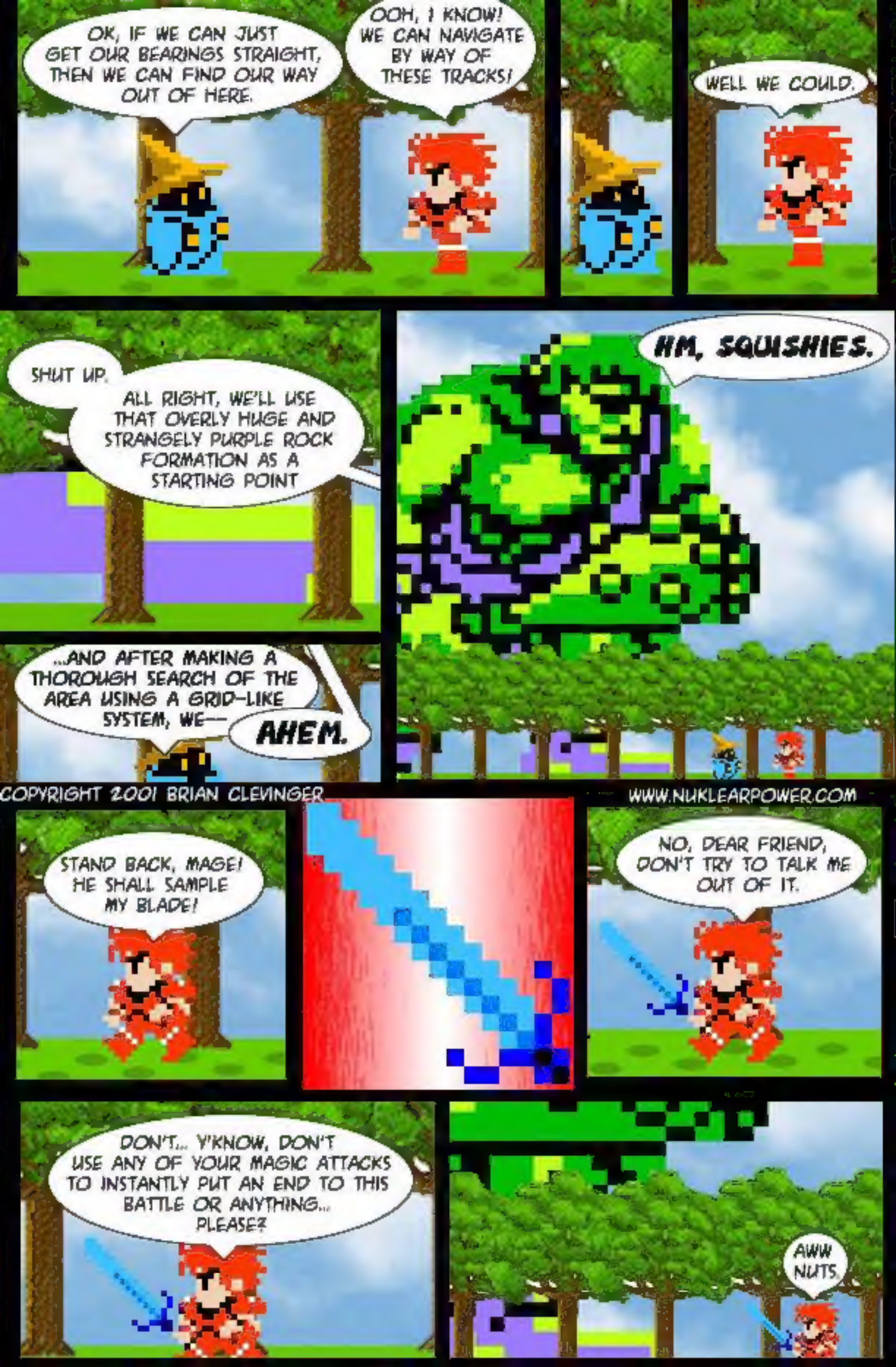
OK, IF WE CAN JUST GET OUR BEARINGS STRAIGHT, THEN WE CAN FIND OUR WAY OUT OF HERE.
OOH, I KNOW! WE CAN NAVIGATE BY WAY OF THESE TRACKS!
WELL WE COULD.
SHUT UP.
ALL RIGHT, WE'LL USE THAT OVERLY HUGE AND STRANGELY PURPLE ROCK FORMATION AS A STARTING POINT
HM, SQUISHIES.
...AND AFTER MAKING A THOROUGH SEARCH OF THE AREA USING A GRID-LIKE SYSTEM, WE—
AHEM.
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STAND BACK, MAGE! HE SHALL SAMPLE MY BLADE!
NO, DEAR FRIEND, DON'T TRY TO TALK ME OUT OF IT.
DON'T... Y'KNOW, DON'T USE ANY OF YOUR MAGIC ATTACKS TO INSTANTLY PUT AN END TO THIS BATTLE OR ANYTHING... PLEASE?
AWW NUTS.

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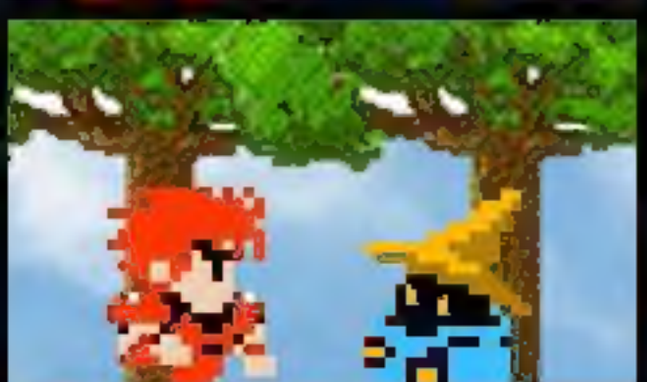

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CRAK!
EEYARG!!
Riiiip!
SNAP!
yargh!
WHAM!
HM, SO THE BROOM TALKS BACKWARDS. FASCINATING.
OH GOOD LORD NO! STOP, I BEG OF YOU! WAIT, WHAT ARE... NO, NOT THE CLUB, NOT THERE, IT'S FAR TOO LAR—
ARRRRRGH!!!
FOUR WHITE MAGES? IT'LL NEVER WORK.
WHAP!
DO I HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING MYSELF? SHEESH.
KILL ME.
TEMPTING, BUT I NEED YOU FOR A SHIELD... I MEAN TRAVELLING COHORT. YEAH.
BESIDES, IT'S TIME TO KICK SOME GIANT ASS.
?
HADOKEN!
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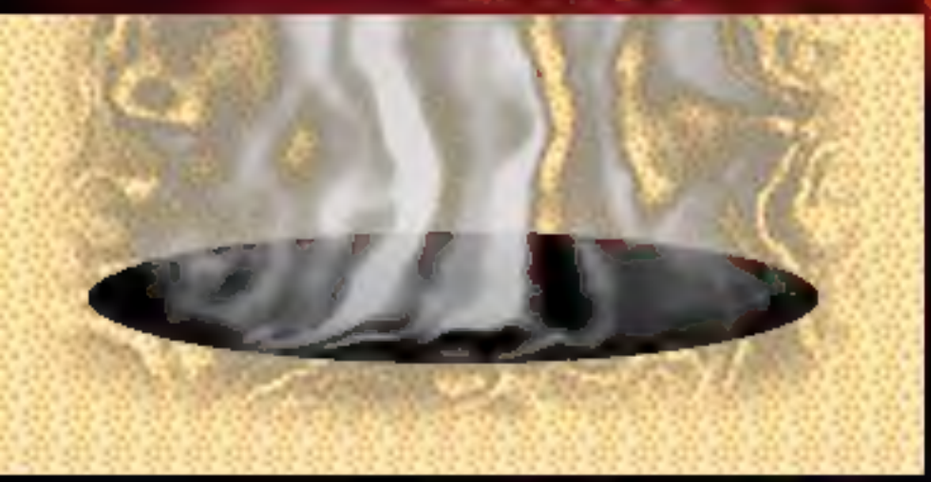

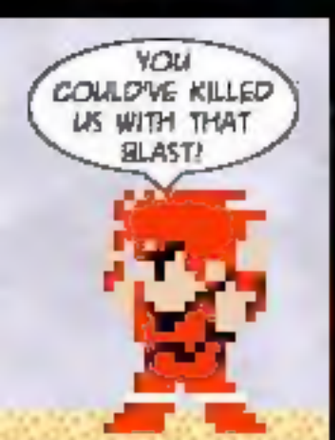

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I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU NUKED THE GIANT'S FOREST. NOW WE'LL NEVER FIND THE CAVE OF NO RETURN. JERK.
UGH. THERE NEVER WAS A CAVE OF NO RETURN, YOU CLOD.
YEAH RIGHT, LIKE THE OLD MAN WOULD LIE AFTER I PAID HIM ALL OUR GOLD IN EXCHANGE FOR SOME INFORMATION ON WHERE TO FIND AN ADVENTURE.
I HATE TO BREAK IT TO YOU, BUT HE TOOK OUR GOLD.
HA! YOU THINK YOU'RE SO SMART. WELL, FOR YOUR INFORMATION, HE DIDN'T TAKE OUR GOLD, I GAVE IT TO HIM, SO THERE.
DUH, I AM THE FIGHTER. I GIVES AWAY ALL OF OUR SHINEYS.
BLARG! I AM DEAD!
?
HEH HEH, SUCKER.
AHEM. NEVERMIND. LET'S JUST GET BACK TO TOWN.
WHY?
TO GET OUR MONEY BACK FROM THE OLD MAN!
SHUFFLE SHUFFLE SHUFFLE
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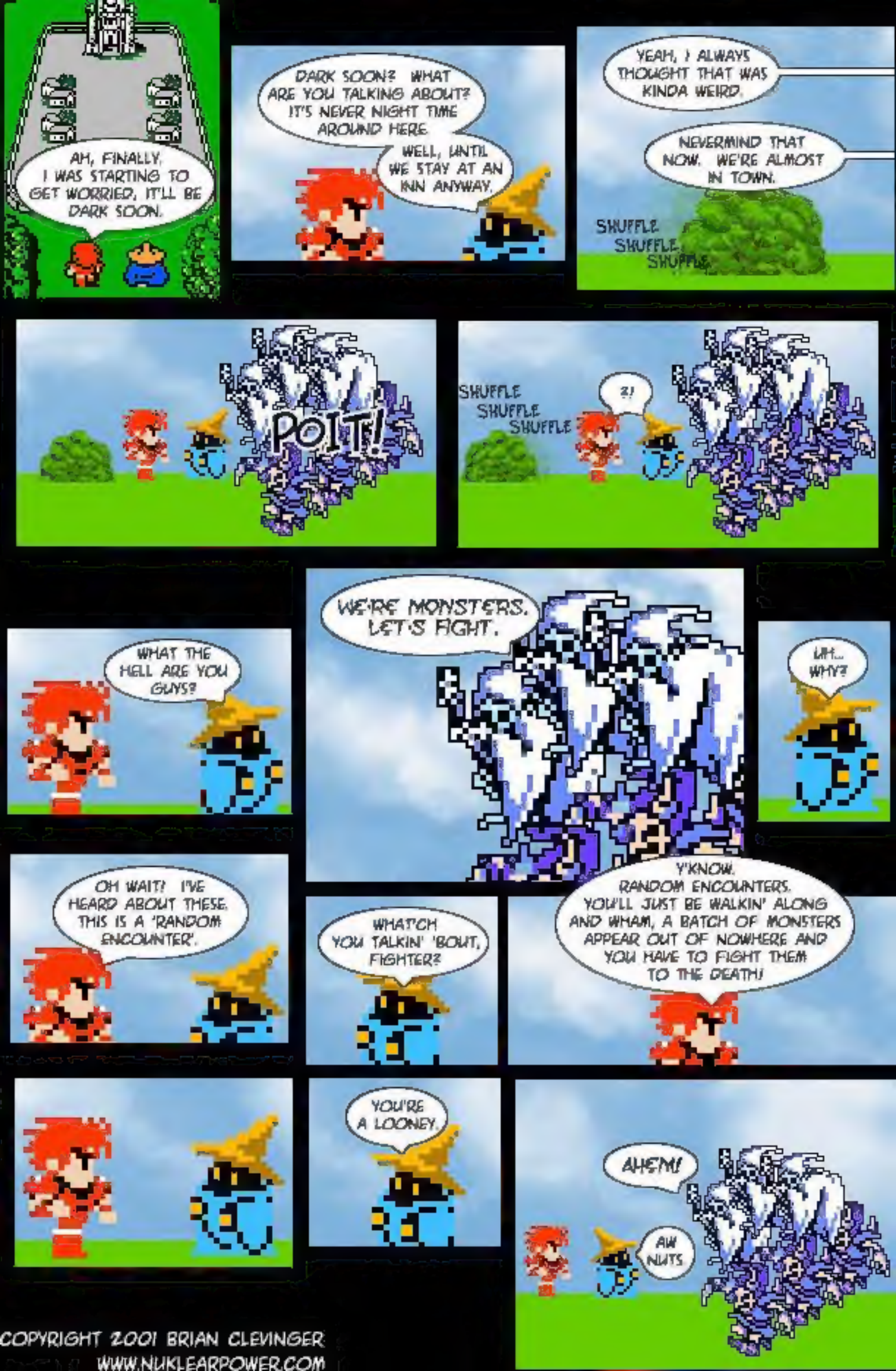
WELL, WHAT'RE WE WAITING ON!
THE PLOT THINKENS...
SHUFFLE SHUFFLE SHUFFLE



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MAN ARE YOU MONSTERS IN FOR IT NOW
THEY ARE²
SEE MY BUDDY HERE² HE'S A BLACK MAGE, A MASTER OF THE DARK ART OF DESTRUCTION, A WIELDER OF WILL, A NEXUS OF POWER THAT IS TAPPED INTO THE VERY LIVING LEY LINES OF THE COSMOS! HE CAN SHAKE THE VERY BOUNDS OF CREATION WITH BUT A SINGLE WORD!
ACTUALLY
THE HEAVENS BOW TO THE MIGHT OF HIS MAGIC! THE GODS QUIVER IN FEAR THAT HE SHOULD FIND THEM LACKING HIS FAVOR. REALITY ITSELF IS HIS PLAYTHING, NOTHING MORE THAN CLAY IN THIS SCULPTOR'S MASTERFUL AND PRECISE HANDS!
UM, BUT
BUT YOU NEED NOT TAKE MY WORD FOR IT LO. FOR BEHIND US. CAN YOU NOT SEE THE SMOLDERING CRATER WHAT ONCE WAS KNOWN AS GIANT'S FOREST² IT HAS BEEN REDUCED TO MERE ASHES. HOW YOU ASK² T'WAS THE WORK OF THIS VERY MAGE SAYS I!
IF YOU'D LET ME TALK
AND NOW YOU STAND AGAINST HIM² OH, HOW I PITY YOU FOUL AND WRETCHED CREATURES. AT LEAST TAKE SOME SOLACE IN KNOWING THAT YOUR UTTER OBLITERATION SHALL BE SO NIGH-INSTANTANEOUS THAT YOU WON'T HAVE THE CHANCE TO FEEL HOW EXCRUTIATINGLY PAINFUL IT IS.
OF COURSE.
EXCUSE US.
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING!
I'M TAUNTING THEM ABOUT THE INCRED-IBLE POWER AT YOUR DISPOSAL
YOU IDIOT! I CAN ONLY CAST THAT SPELL ONCE A DAY I'VE GOT NOTHING LEFT!
WELL WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY SOMETHING SOONER²
GOD, I HATE YOU
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SO NOW WHAT?
WE RUN LIKE SCARED LITTLE FOREST ELVES, THAT'S WHAT!
RUN? RUN?! WE CAN'T RUN! NOT AFTER ALL THAT WAS SAID ABOUT YOUR MAGIC POWERS!
AND WHO'S FAULT IS THAT?
NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO POINT FINGERS.
UH-HUH.
WE AIN'T GOT ALL DAY, Y'KNOW.
MAKE IT QUICK.
SORRY GUYS, JUST ONE SECOND
THOSE MONSTERS ARE GONNA EAT US ALIVE!
OH, HEAVENS NO.
HOW BARBARIC!
HUMAN FLESH? RAW?
WHAT DOES HE THINK WE ARE, MONSTERS?
WELL, YEAH WE ARE MONSTERS. BUT WE'RE NOT MONSTERS ABOUT IT.
ENOUGH TALK. ATTACK!
MAGE, YOU'VE GOT TO THINK OF SOMETHING!
I HAVE. FIGHTER I HAVE
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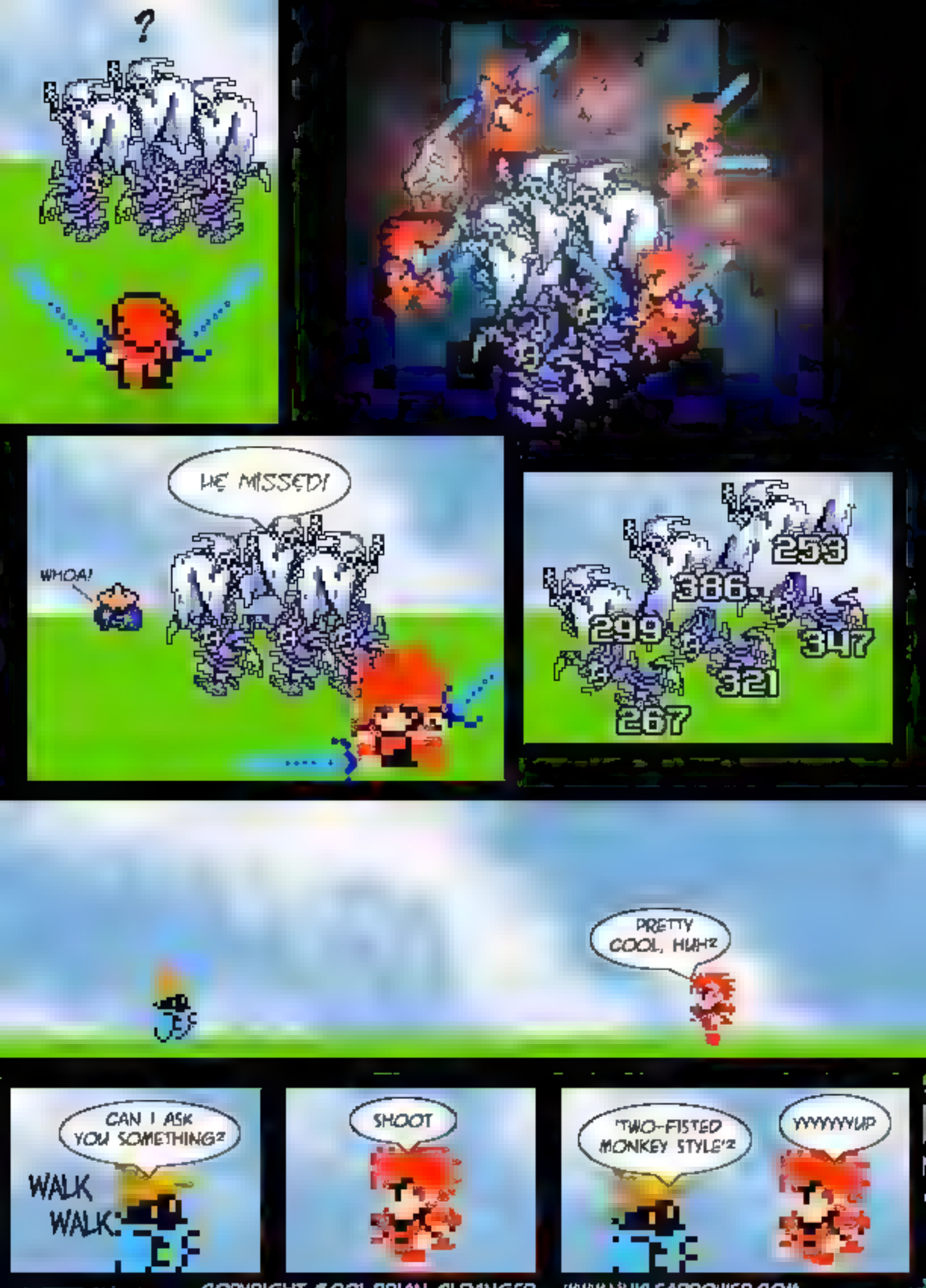

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I LIKE SWORDS.
WE
TO
COME HERE, YOU IDIOT!
I LIKE SWORDS.
WELCOME TO CORNERIA!
YO.
WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?
WHAT? I'M A FIGHTER. I REALLY DO LIKE SWORDS.
DOESN'T IT SEEM ODD TO YOU THAT THE GUARDS CAN ONLY SAY ONE USELESS PHRASE OVER AND OVER?
I THOUGHT HE WAS BEING FRIENDLY
FORGET IT LET'S JUST GET INSIDE AND SEE WHAT'S GOING ON.
AND SO, IN THE CITY OF CORNERIA...
WANTED
WANTED:
4 Ye Olde Lighte Warriorse
Ofe Destinye Toe Rescuee
Kingdome Frome Darknesse.
Inquiree Withine.
DUDE! THIS IS RIGHT UP OUR ALLEY! WE'RE HEROES. WE CAN DO THIS.
YOU FIGHT FOR MONEY. I WEAVE OCCULT MAGIKS FOR MONEY AND YOU GIVE IT ALL AWAY BECAUSE YOU'RE A MORON. HEROES, WE AIN'T
HEY, YEAH! WHAT A GREAT IDEA! WE'LL SACRIFICE OURSELVES FOR THE GREATER GOOD—THBBBBBT! NOW LET'S GO RUCKUS THAT OLD MAN.
WE COULD GIVE IT A SHOT
MEANWHILE.
SHUFFLE
SHUFFLE
SHUFFLE
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SUCKERS!
LIGHTE WARRIORE TRYE-OUTSE TODAYE
NEXT
HI! I'M CLOUD!
ALL RIGHT, CLOUD. WHAT'CHA GOT FOR US?
WELL, I CAN SUMMON THE GODS THEMSELVES TO DO MY BIDDING
AWESOME! SUMMON ME UP A GOD AND SMITE SOMETHIN'!
FOOM!!!
TICK TOCK
TICK TOCK
TICK TOCK
SHOOM!!!
THOOL
KA-BOOM!
THOOM!
GROOM?
BEAR WITH ME, OK JUST A LITTLE LONGER. I'M ALMOST THERE. JUST A FEW MORE IMPRESSIVE POSES AND 3D LIGHTING EFFECTS, MAYBE A LENS FLARE OR TWO JUST FOR KICKS. OOH. DID YOU SEE THAT? WOW, I'M COOL
NEAT! KEEN!
IMPRESSIVE!
TIME CONSUMING!
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TICK TOCK
TICK TOCK
TICK TOCK
ZOOOM!
BAMF!
WAAARK!
TA DA!
YAWN
WTF?
WARK!
SO. ANYTHING ELSE?
WARK!
I'VE GOT A GIANTIC SWORD
DUDE!
WOB
BBBLE
WHAM
WARK!
OUCH
WARK?
NEXT
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WELL, IF I HAD TO GUESS, I'D SAY THAT'S ELECTRIC DEATH.
WHAT'S HE DOING?
BOLT-2, MUTHA FUGGA!
KZZZZT!!!
DIZZLE
BURN
MEEP
BARTENDER
HIDE!
IS HIDING.
THIS'LL GO A LOT EASIER IF YOU CO-OPERATE GOT ME!
I WANNA KNOW WHICH ONE OF YOU CRUSTY OLD PUNKS TOOK A WHOLE LOTTA GOLD FROM MY IDIOT FRIEND, FIGHTER
DIZZLE
BURN
WRONG ANSWER!
IT WASN'T THEM! THEY HAVEN'T LEFT THIS BUI..DING IN TEN YEARS.
PLEASE DON'T KILL ME
WHEW
YOING!
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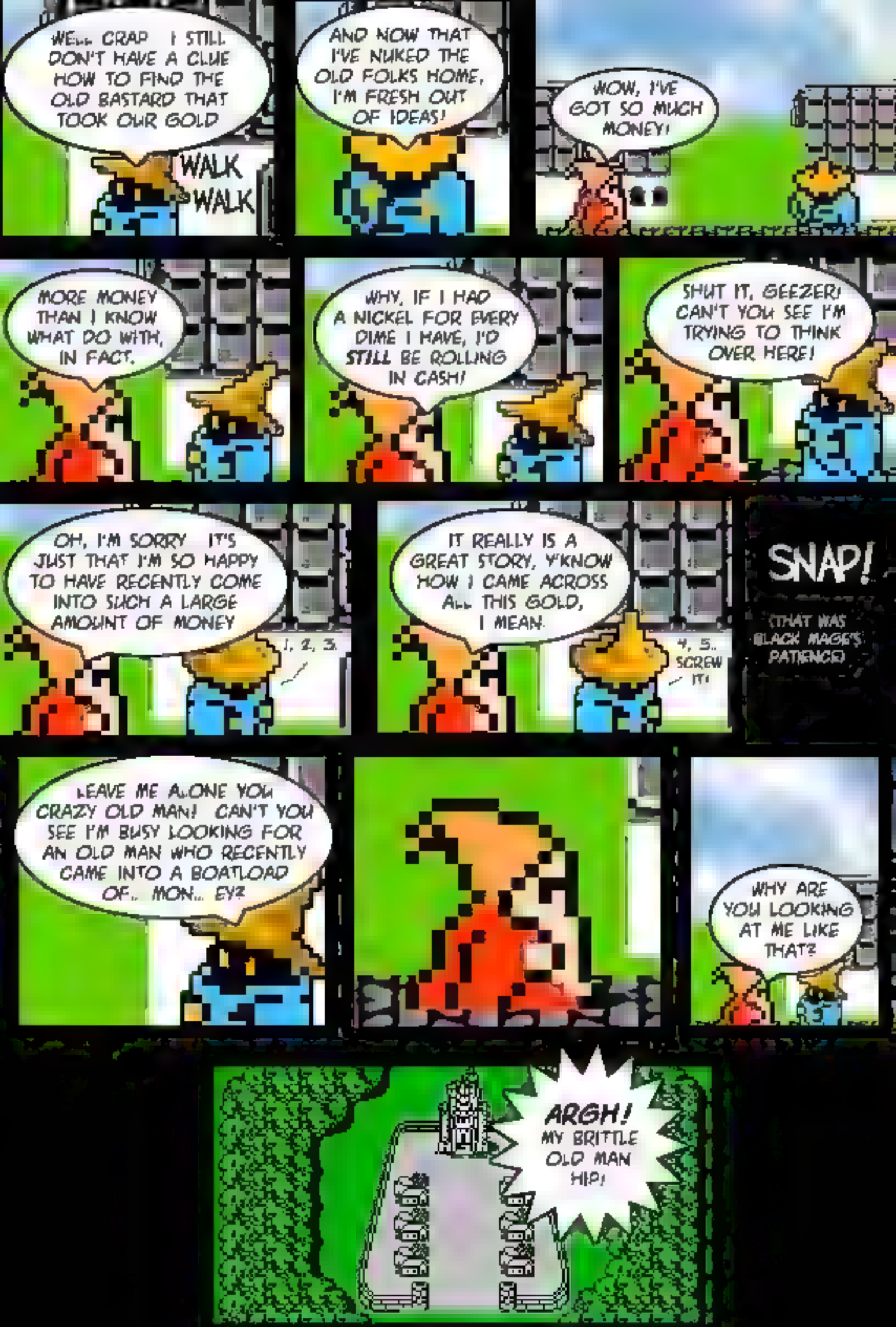

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OK, SO I GOT OUR GOLD BACK FROM THE OLD MAN. NOW ALL I HAVE TO DO IS FIND FIGHTER SO WE CAN SPLIT THE GOODS.
WALK
WALK
MAGIC SHOP!
Spells of Mass Destruction
20% Off! Today Only
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OF COURSE, I BET FIGHTER WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY SPEND HIS SHARE ON WEAPONS AND ARMOR THAT WILL PROVE TO BE VASTLY INFERIOR TO WHAT WE WILL FIND IN OUR TRAVELS. AND IF HE DOESN'T KNOW I GOT THE MONEY BACK.
MEANWHILE...
WONDER HOW BLACK MAGE IS DOIN' WITH THAT OLD MAN. I SURE WOULD LIKE TO SPEND MY SHARE OF THE CASH ON WEAPONS AND ARMOR THAT WILL BE VASTLY INFERIOR TO WHAT WE WILL INEVITABLY FIND IN OUR TRAVELS. 'CAUSE THEY'RE SHINY.
AND SO, INSIDE THE MAGIC SHOP...
HM. MAGIC MISSILE? HEH, DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH
LORLOVEIM'S CREEPING SHADOW? LAAAAAME!
MORDENKAINEN'S CELERITY? HA, WEEEEEAAAAK
YO, SHOPKEEP!
WHAT IS IT?
WHERE DO YOU KEEP THE REAL SPELLS, MAN? THIS STUFF IS CHILD'S PLAY!
IF YOU MUST KNOW, I KEEP THE TRULY POWERFUL SPELLS HERE BEHIND THE COUNTER.
OH YEAH? GIMME GIMME GIMME!!!
DO NOT SULLY THE SPELL BOOKS WITH YOUR GREASY HANDS. THEY ARE VERY RARE AND NOT TO BE TAKEN LIGHTLY
MUST BE PRETTY POWERFUL SPELLS, HUH?
OH, YOUR POWERS OF DEDUCTION ARE EXCEPTIONAL! I SIMPLY CAN'T ALLOW YOU TO WASTE THEM HERE WHEN THERE ARE SO MANY MONSTERS ROAMING THE LAND AT THIS VERY MOMENT GO, GO! FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY!
WISE ASS.

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SCORE 00080060
BANGA
MISSILEDOKEN'
TIME

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HEY, I'M SORRY ABOUT BEFORE, BUT I REALLY DO HAVE SOMETHING I WANT TO TELL YOU.
MAKE IT QUICK.
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I JUST WANTED TO SAY THAT THOSE ROBES LOOK REALLY GOOD ON YOU
WHY THANK YOU.
BUT BABY, THEY'D LOOK EVEN BETTA ON MY BEDROOM FLOOR!
BABY, I KNOW YOU MUST BE TIRED 'CAUSE YOU'VE BEEN WALKIN' THROUGH MY MIND ALL DAY
THAT MUST BE JAM 'CAUSE JELLY DON'T SHAKE LIKE DAT!
IF I SAID YOU HAD A BEAUTIFUL BODY, WOULD YOU HOLD IT AGAINST ME?
WHAT? YOU DON'T LIKE PIZZA?
FOOOSH!
RIBS... BROKEN. ORGANS... BLEEDING. SPLEEN... STILL UNACCOUNTED FOR. (WHEEEZE)
SIGH.
LOUSY WHITE MAGE'S OATH

I KNOW I SHOULD
AGONY
OH FINE. CURE!
40
STRENGTH.. RETURNING. BONES... MENDED. ORGANS... HEALED. SELF-NARATION.. FADING
AND I OWE IT A... TO YOU.
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YEAH, WELL LET'S NOT MAKE A BIG THING OF IT. I JUST DID WHAT TO BE DONE.
WAIT. I... I WANT TO APOLOGIZE TO YOU.
THIS OUGHTA BE GOOD
Y'SEE, IT'S JUST THAT YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY A VERY INTELLIGENT AND BEAUTIFUL WOMAN AND I GUESS I WAS TRYING TO IMPRESS YOU.
WHY?
WELL, UM.. MY FRIEND AND I ARE TRYING OUT FOR THAT LIGHT WARRIOR JOB I THOUGHT THAT..
A WHITE MAGE WOULD MAKE AN EXCELLENT ADDITION TO THE TEAM?
ER. YEAH!
WELL WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY SO?
I GUESS I GOT NERVOUS ABOUT APPROACHING A WOMAN OF YOUR HIGH CALIBUR
A CUTE LITTLE GUY LIKE YOU DOESN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO BE NERVOUS ABOUT
NOW LET'S MEET THIS FRIEND OF YOURS.
WOW, THAT ACTUALLY WORKED! SUCKER!

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YO FIGHTER. HOW GOES THE HERO SEARCH?
I FOUND ONE ALREADY! HE'S GREAT GUY.
OH YEAH? WHERE IS HE?
WELL, LET'S SEE HE KEPT PATROLLING THE LINE OF APPLICANTS TO MAKE SURE THERE WERE NO PICK-POCKETS ABOUT BUT I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM IN A WHILE NOW
HEY, SORRY ABOUT THAT I HAD TO GO TO YE OLDE PAWNE SHOPPE TO CASH IN MY "FINDINGS."
FINDINGS?
OH SURE. YOU'D BE SURPRISED BY THE THINGS PEOPLE "DROP" AND THE FREQUENCY WITH WHICH THEY ARE "DROPPED" GIVEN THEIR HIGH MONETARY VALUES
I SEE.
COINCIDENTALLY, I MANAGE TO FIND A LOT OF "DROPPED" THINGS
AND TAKE THEM TO A PAWN SHOP
I BELIEVE IN SHARING THE WEALTH.
OF OTHERS!
IT'S SO SWEET OF HIM TO GIVE TO CHARITY!
SEE? I TOLD YA HE WAS A GREAT GUY!
HE'S A THIEF!
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IT'S PROBABLY TO MASK HIS OWN SELF-LOATHING
DON'T BE HURT HE LASHES OUT AT EVERYONE. HE HAS ISSUES HE NEEDS TO WORK THROUGH.
YOU KNOW, I'VE BEEN SAYING THAT FOR YEARS.
I COULD VERY EASILY DESTROY YOU ALL.
BUT WOULDN'T YOU ONLY BE DESTROYING YOURSELF?

WELL ANYWAY, I FOUND US ANOTHER HERO. HER NAME IS WHITE MAGE
HIYA!
AND WHAT SKILLS WILL SHE DONATE TO OUR WORTHY CAUSE?
GRRR
HOLD ON THERE, ACE WHO SAID YOU COULD JOIN US?
FIGHTER DID
WELL, IT'S NOT OFFICIAL UNTIL BOTH HE AND I AGREE SO THERE
IMPOR-TANT DOC-U-MENT
NOT ACCORDING TO THIS!
SAYS HERE THAT A ONE BLACK MAGE AND A ONE FIGHTER WILL JOIN MY CADRE OF JUSTICE TO VANQUISH EVIL FROM THE WORLD AND RESTORE PEACE ALL THROUGHOUT
IN RETURN, THE PARTIES OF THE FIRST AND SECOND PARTS, THAT'S YOU TWO.
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AND A THIRD PARTY TO BE NAMED AT A LATER DATE, POSSIBLY YOU, WHITE MAGE
...WILL RECEIVE A SHARE OF XP AND GP FROM SLAIN ENEMIES EQUAL TO WHAT I WILL DEEM FAIR TO ALL OTHER PARTIES, I.E., ME, AT THE TIME OF SLAYING.
THAT IS, OF COURSE, AFTER I GET FIRST DIBS ON EVERYTHING WE FIND, SOLVE, REPAIR, BREAK AND/OR DESTROY, DEFEAT, OR HEAR ABOUT
FIGHTER, DID YOU ACTUALLY AGREE TO THESE TERMS?!
YES. BUT! I MADE SURE THERE WAS A CLAUSE STATING THAT I COULD DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT I LIKE ANY OF THE SWORDS THAT WE FIND IN OUR TRAVELS.
I HAD TO GIVE UP THE DENTAL PLAN FOR IT THOUGH
JUST.. STOP.. TALKING.

BLAH BLAH BLAH SWORDS BLAH BLAH.
BLAH BLAH THROWING KNIVES BLAH BLAH
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OH MAN. THIS GIRL IS JUST TOO PERFECT. I MEAN, SHE CASTS MAGIC, I CAST MAGIC. SHE'S CUTE AND I'M NOT ENTIRELY HIDEOUS. WE'VE GOT SO MUCH IN COMMON!
JUST LOOK AT HER! IT'S NOT NATURAL TO BE THAT DAMN HOT! THEY OUGHTA PASS A LAW AGAINST THOSE EYES 'CAUSE DAMN!
AND RED HAIR. IT JUST HAD TO BE RED HAIR, DIDN'T IT. AS IF IT WASN'T ALREADY PAINFULLY OBVIOUS THAT SHE COULD NEVER BE INTERESTED IN A TWISTED SOUL LIKE ME, THE FOUL AND WRETCHED FATES HAVE TO GIVE HER RED HAIR. THAT'S. THAT'S JUST PLAIN UNFAIR IS WHAT THAT IS. WOMEN LIKE THIS JUST CAN'T BE REAL. I BET UNDER THOSE ROBES SHE'S REALLY SOME ROBOT OR MONSTER!
SO, BLACK MAGE, WHAT'RE YOU THINKING ABOUT?
NO I AM NOT UNDRESSING YOU WITH THE POWER OF MY MIND!
WHEW. SHE DOESN'T SUSPECT A THING!

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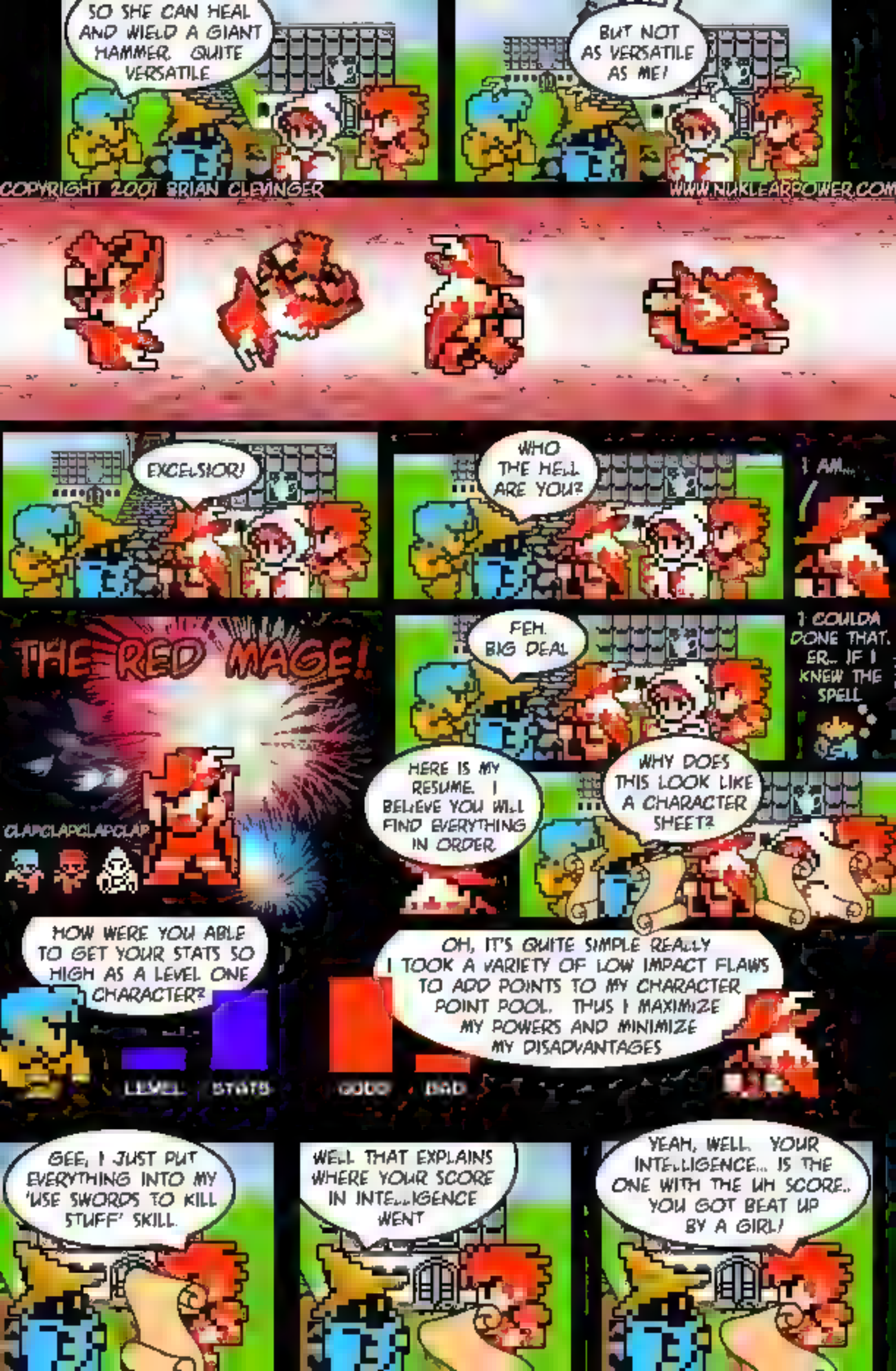
SO SHE CAN HEAL AND WIELD A GIANT HAMMER. QUITE VERSATILE
BUT NOT AS VERSATILE AS ME!
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EXCELSIOR!
WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?
I AM...
THE RED MAGE!
CLAPCLAPCLAPCLAP
FEH. BIG DEAL
I COULDA DONE THAT. ER... IF I KNEW THE SPELL
HERE IS MY RESUME. I BELIEVE YOU WILL FIND EVERYTHING IN ORDER.
WHY DOES THIS LOOK LIKE A CHARACTER SHEET?
HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO GET YOUR STATS SO HIGH AS A LEVEL ONE CHARACTER?
OH, IT'S QUITE SIMPLE REALLY I TOOK A VARIETY OF LOW IMPACT FLAWS TO ADD POINTS TO MY CHARACTER POINT POOL. THUS I MAXIMIZE MY POWERS AND MINIMIZE MY DISADVANTAGES
LEVEL
STATS
GOOD
BAD
GEE, I JUST PUT EVERYTHING INTO MY 'USE SWORDS TO KILL STUFF' SKILL.
WELL THAT EXPLAINS WHERE YOUR SCORE IN INTELLIGENCE WENT
YEAH, WELL. YOUR INTELLIGENCE... IS THE ONE WITH THE UH SCORE.. YOU GOT BEAT UP BY A GIRL!

WELL, IT LOOKS LIKE WE'VE GOT A PRETTY GOOD TEAM HERE
I'M AFRAID NOT THE RULES SPECIFICALLY STATE THAT THERE CAN ONLY BE FOUR LIGHT WARRIORS. WE ARE FIVE
I ONLY COUNT FOUR OF US.
YOU FORGOT TO COUNT YOURSELF! YOU CLOD
BLACK MAGE HAS A MEAN IMAGINATION.
WELL MAYBE, JUST MAYBE, WHEN WE APPROACH THE KING, HE'LL MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE AND FORGET TO COUNT HIMSELF TOO!
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WWW.QUESTIONER.COM
HE IS SHAKING WITH RAGE
WAIT THAT WOULDN'T WORK I'M SO BAD ASS THAT I COUNT FOR TWO LIGHT WARRIORS, SO THE KING WOULD STILL PERCEIVE US AS FIVE. DAMN MY INCREDIBLE FIGHTING SKILLS!
LET GO OF ME! JUST ONE FIREBALL, THAT'S ALL I ASK! I DESERVE AT LEAST THAT MUCH AFTER ALL THESE YEARS!

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LOOK. WE'RE GOING TO VOTE ONE OF US OUT, AND WE NEED YOUR HAT TO DO IT
WHY DO WE HAVE TO USE MY HAT? RED MAGE HAS A PERFECTLY GOOD HAT. USE HIS.
(SEE, IT'S A HAT!)
THAT CAN BE ARRANGED
HEY! I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW THIS IS A PLUMED HAT OF POWER. IT GIVES ME A +4 TO MY MAGIC SCORE. THE ONLY WAY YOU'RE GETTING THIS HAT IS OFF MY COLD, DEAD BODY
YOU AND WHAT ARMY OF ARCHFIENDS, CHUMP-BOY?
GRRRRR
COME ON NOW, GUYS. LET'S SETTLE THIS LIKE ADULTS
LIE ABOUT YOUR SAVING ROLL?
STEAL FROM THE ELDERLY BECAUSE THEY CAN'T FIGHT BACK?
BLAST A HIGHLY POPULATED AREA INTO ASHES, BLAME IT ON FIGHTER, AND RUN LIKE HELL?
I KNEW YOU WERE LYING ABOUT THAT! I DON'T EVEN KNOW ANY SPELLS, MAGE HOW COULD I NUKE THAT TOWN?
... THINK I'M GOING TO VOTE MYSELF OFF
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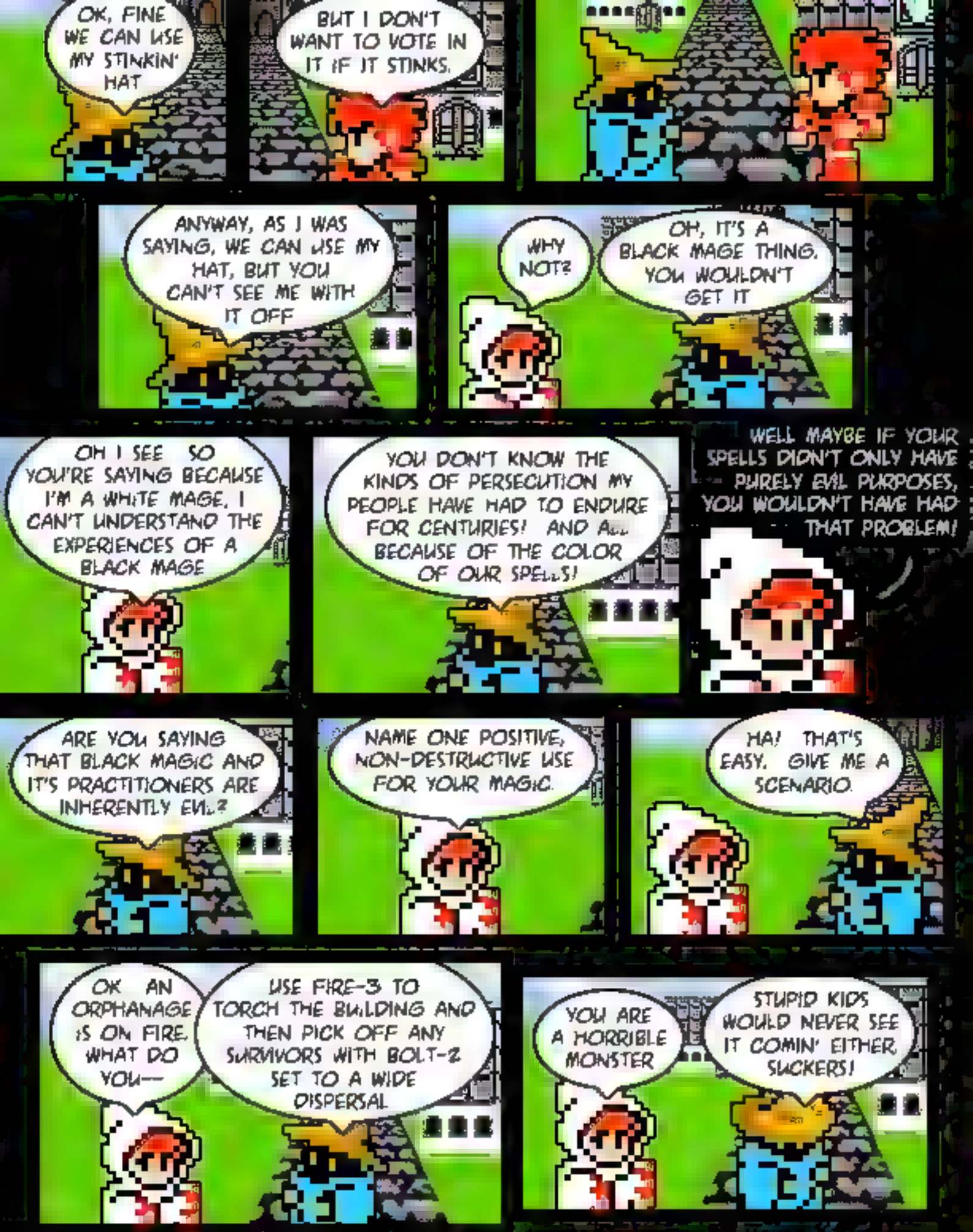
OK, FINE WE CAN USE MY STINKIN' HAT
BUT I DON'T WANT TO VOTE IN IT IF IT STINKS.
ANYWAY, AS I WAS SAYING, WE CAN USE MY HAT, BUT YOU CAN'T SEE ME WITH IT OFF
WHY NOT?
OH, IT'S A BLACK MAGE THING. YOU WOULDN'T GET IT
OH I SEE SO YOU'RE SAYING BECAUSE I'M A WHITE MAGE, I CAN'T UNDERSTAND THE EXPERIENCES OF A BLACK MAGE
YOU DON'T KNOW THE KINDS OF PERSECUTION MY PEOPLE HAVE HAD TO ENDURE FOR CENTURIES! AND ALL BECAUSE OF THE COLOR OF OUR SPELLS!
WELL MAYBE IF YOUR SPELLS DIDN'T ONLY HAVE PURELY EVIL PURPOSES, YOU WOULDN'T HAVE HAD THAT PROBLEM!
ARE YOU SAYING THAT BLACK MAGIC AND IT'S PRACTITIONERS ARE INHERENTLY EVIL?
NAME ONE POSITIVE, NON-DESTRUCTIVE USE FOR YOUR MAGIC.
HA! THAT'S EASY. GIVE ME A SCENARIO.
OK AN ORPHANAGE IS ON FIRE. WHAT DO YOU—
USE FIRE-3 TO TORCH THE BUILDING AND THEN PICK OFF ANY SURVIVORS WITH BOLT-2 SET TO A WIDE DISPERSAL
YOU ARE A HORRIBLE MONSTER
STUPID KIDS WOULD NEVER SEE IT COMIN' EITHER SUCKERS!
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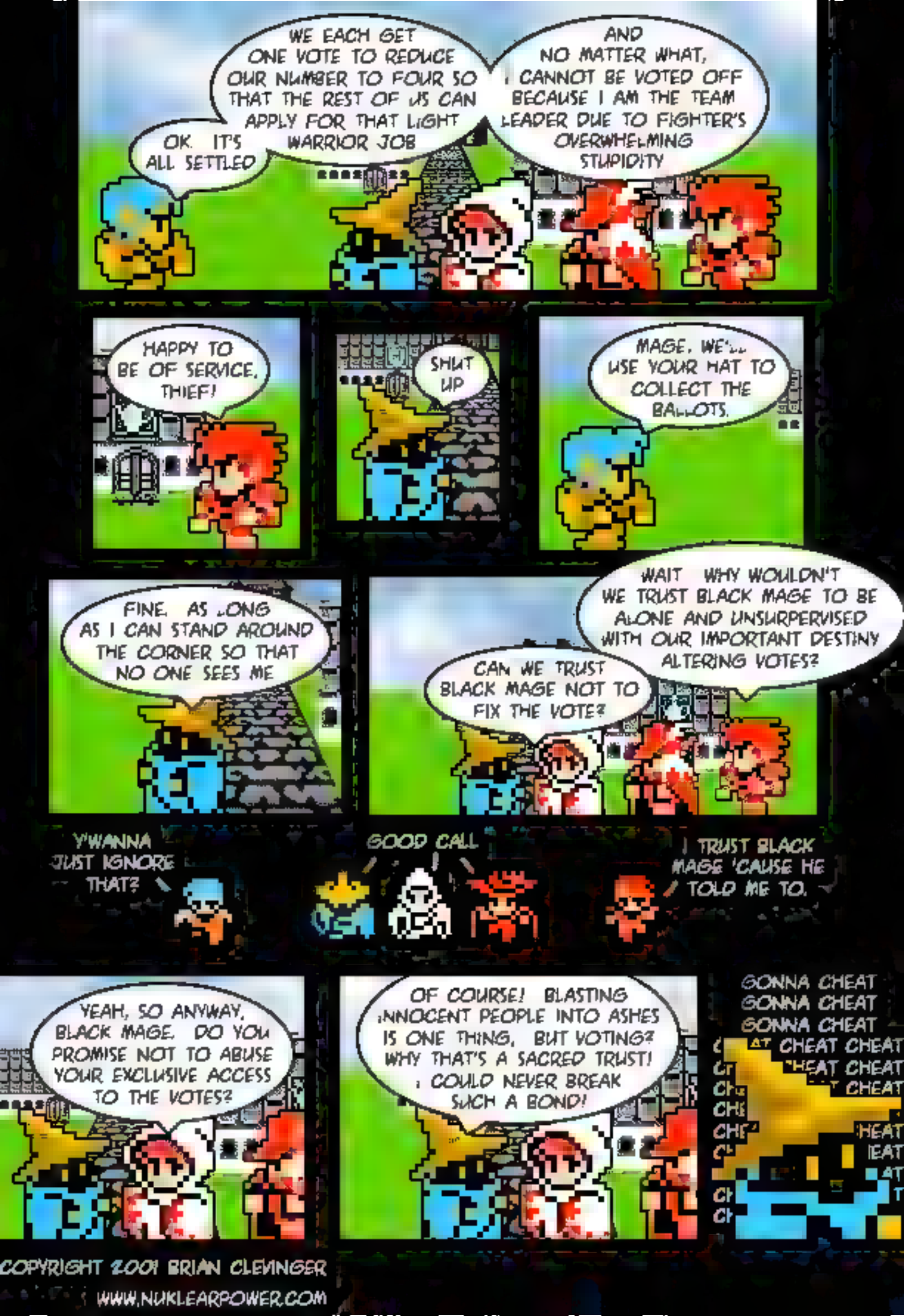
AT LEAST I GOT TO SAY A LINE
MAYBE WE'LL GET TO BE IN THE NEXT ONE.


WE EACH GET ONE VOTE TO REDUCE OUR NUMBER TO FOUR SO THAT THE REST OF US CAN APPLY FOR THAT LIGHT WARRIOR JOB
OK. IT'S ALL SETTLED
AND NO MATTER WHAT, I CANNOT BE VOTED OFF BECAUSE I AM THE TEAM LEADER DUE TO FIGHTER'S OVERWHELMING STUPIDITY
HAPPY TO BE OF SERVICE, THIEF!
SHUT UP
MAGE, WE'LL USE YOUR HAT TO COLLECT THE BALLOTS.
FINE. AS LONG AS I CAN STAND AROUND THE CORNER SO THAT NO ONE SEES ME
CAN WE TRUST BLACK MAGE NOT TO FIX THE VOTE?
WAIT WHY WOULDN'T WE TRUST BLACK MAGE TO BE ALONE AND UNSUPERVISED WITH OUR IMPORTANT DESTINY ALTERING VOTES?
Y'WANNA JUST IGNORE THAT?
GOOD CALL
I TRUST BLACK MAGE 'CAUSE HE TOLD ME TO.
YEAH, SO ANYWAY, BLACK MAGE. DO YOU PROMISE NOT TO ABUSE YOUR EXCLUSIVE ACCESS TO THE VOTES?
OF COURSE! BLASTING INNOCENT PEOPLE INTO ASHES IS ONE THING, BUT VOTING? WHY THAT'S A SACRED TRUST! I COULD NEVER BREAK SUCH A BOND!
GONNA CHEAT
GONNA CHEAT
GONNA CHEAT
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WALK
WALK
OK, I'M READY!
HERE YA GO.
DUE TO MY VERSATILITY, I SHOULD GET TWO VOTES.
SHUT UP
PUT THEM BACK!
ER SORRY OLD HABITS, YOU KNOW
SNIFF, SNIFF. IT DOES SMELL KINDA FUNNY. WHAT DO YOU SHAMPOO WITH, ANYWAY?
SHUT IT AND DROP IT
YOU KNOW, HE WOULDN'T HAVE THIS SELF-IMAGE PROBLEM IF HE'D INVESTED A POINT OR TWO MORE IN HIS CHARISMA ATTRIBUTE
WONDER IF I CAN CHEAT BOTH RED MAGE AND FIGHTER AWAY

OK NOW LET'S HAVE A LOOK AT THESE VOTES

BLACK MAGE

black mage

black mage

CRETINS! DON'T THEY REALIZE THAT MY POWER, AND MY POWER ALONE, CAN POSSIBLY SEE US THROUGH THE HORDES OF MONSTERS OUT THERE?

TOLD YA!

WHY, I OUGHT TO VAPORIZE THE LOT OF THEM WITH A WELL PLACED DOSE OF KILLING THEM WHERE THEY STAND!

...BUT THEN I WOULDN'T HAVE ANYONE TO STAND IN FRONT OF ME IN BATTLE TO TAKE ALL THE HITS

NEXT!

AW CRUD.

SO I'LL JUST GO WITH MY ORIGINAL PLAN AND CHEAT LIKE CRAZY! BWA HAHAHAHAHA!

ADIOS-VILLE POPULATION: FIGHTER!

FIGHTER!

FIGHTER!

FIGHTER

SWORD GUY

BOY, IT SURE IS FUN BEING AN INNOCENT, LITTLE CAREFREE KID LA LA LA!

WALK

WALK

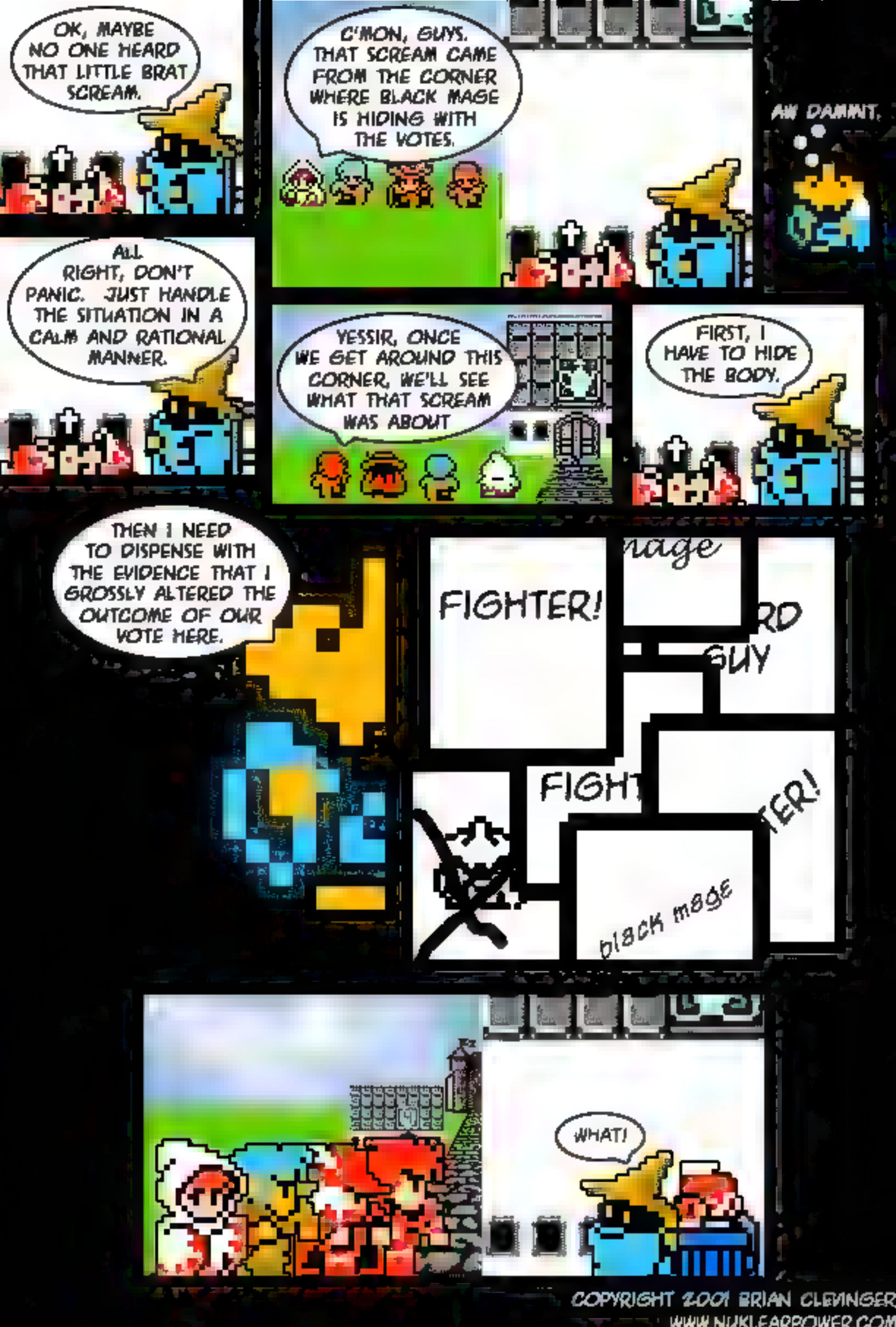
BUMP!

OH, I'M SORRY, MISTER I DIDN'T SEE YOU THERE

DON'T LOOK AT ME!

ARGH!

WELL. NO GOOD CAN COME OF THAT



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OK, I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING, BUT THIS ISN'T WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
IT LOOKS LIKE THIS HARMLESS CHILD STUMBLED UPON YOU WHILE YOU WERE FIXING THE VOTE SO YOU ELIMINATED HIM AS A WITNESS AND NOW YOU'RE DOING AWAY WITH HIS BODY AS EVIDENCE IN WHAT WILL SURELY BECOME THIS WEEK'S TRIAL OF THE CENTURY.
HA! SHOWS WHAT YOU KNOW. I FIXED THE VOTE WAY BEFORE HE STUMBLED UPON ME. SO THERE
I WOULD CRITICISE HIM, BUT HE REALLY OUGHT TO GET AN XP BONUS FOR STAYING IN CHARACTER.
IT'S GETTING TO BE SO THAT YOU CAN'T TRUST ANYBODY THESE DAYS.
MAGE, HOW COULD YOU DO THIS! I THOUGHT WE COULD TRUST YOU!
I AM EVIL, YA KNOW THIS IS WHAT I DO.
WELL, I AM.
ONE SIDE, JERK-ASS.
SHE WANTS ME
IT'S A GOOD THING I KNOW MY SHARE OF HEALING SPELLS. NOT TO MEN-TION MORALS!
HEY! I KNOW OF THEM.
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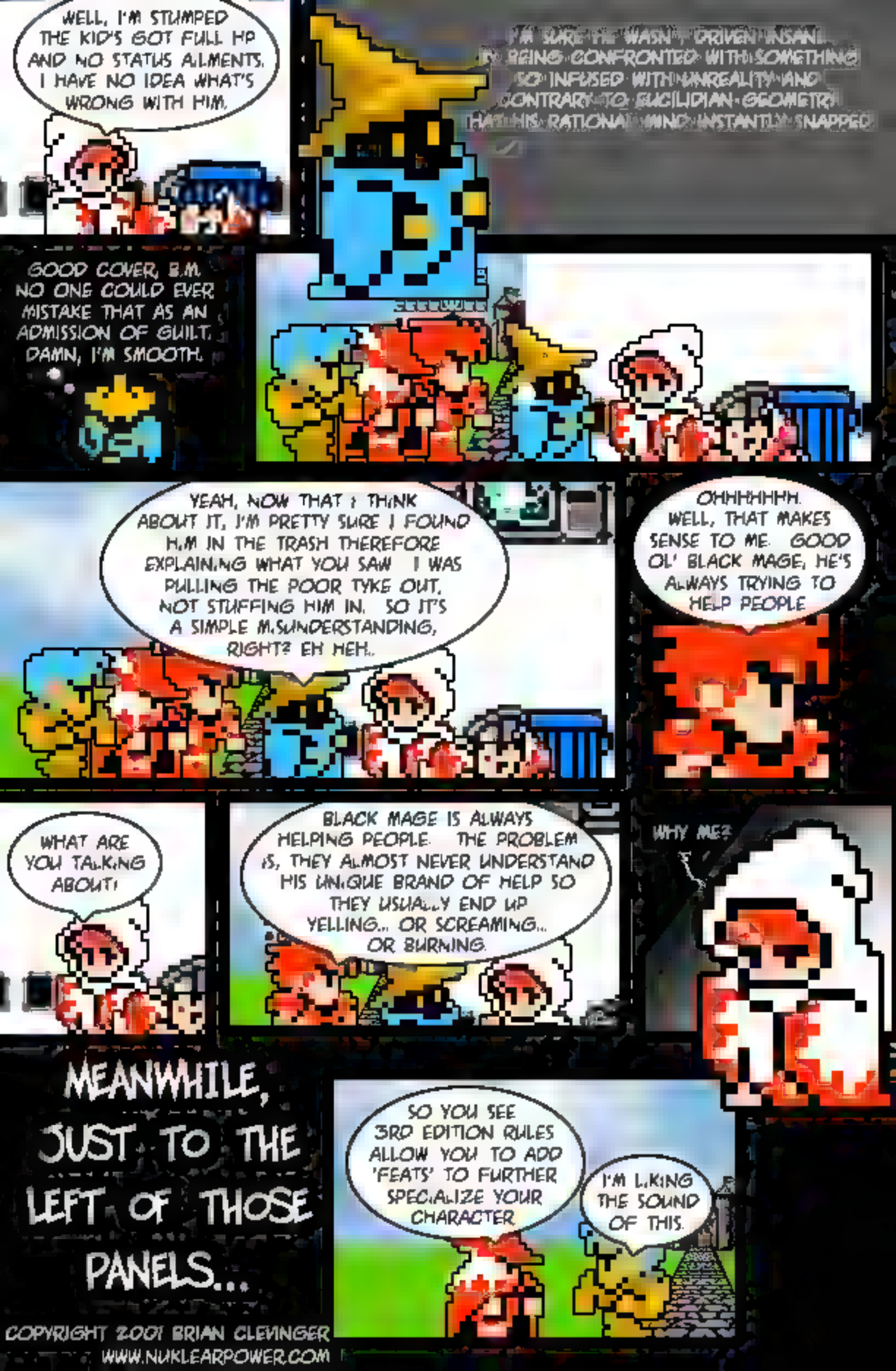
THE MIND OF A CHILD IS FILLED WITH MAGIC BECAUSE IT HAS NOT YET LEARNED TO SUFFOCATE ITSELF WITH THE MUNDANITY OF EXPERIENCE
BUT THE LINE BETWEEN MAGIC AND MADNESS IS FRAGILE AND EASILY FRAYED.
ONE CAN FALL BETWEEN THE CRACKS, SLIP THROUGH THE SHADOWS AND MEET THE DENIZENS OF THE OTHER SIDE OF THE UNIVERSE
BUT IS THAT MAD..
OR " THAT MAGIC..
WHAT DID YOU DO TO THIS KID!
WOULD YOU BELIEVE.. NOTHING?



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UGH... WHAT HAPPENED TO ME?
WE WERE SORT OF HOPING YOU COULD TELL US THAT
WELL... I SEEM TO REMEMBER... I WAS GOING TO THE STORE FOR MY MOM
OK, THEN WHAT?
WELL... IT GETS KINDA FUZZY RIGHT AROUND THERE.
OH, WHAT A SHAME. GUESS WE CAN'T POSSIBLY TRUST THE LITTLE GUY'S MEMORY DUE TO THE TRAUMA THAT HAPPENED BEFORE EVER BOTHERED MIND YOU. SO NO MATTER WHAT HE SAYS IT'S BOUND TO BE VERY WRONG ESPECIALLY IF IT INVOLVES ME IN ANY WAY.
HM. WELL, HOW DO YOU FEEL NOW?
PRETTY GOOD I GUESS. JUST A LITTLE DIZZY, BUT I SHOULD BE FINE THANKS.
GOOD, GOOD OFF YOU GO THEN. DON'T DAWDLE.
AND IF YOU EVER SPEAK OF THIS DAY AGAIN, I'LL REDEFINE YOUR WORLD AS LIVING PAIN.
TOSS!
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Off!
FLAT SURFACES 'R' US
serving all your planar needs for 30 years!
WHAM!
WHAT!
YOU'RE NOT GOOD AT TALKING WITH GIRLS.
I HATE YOU ALL
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SWORD SWORD SWORD SWORDITY SWORD, SWORDITY SWORD SWORD SWORD, SWORD SWORD SWORDITY SWORD, SWORDITY SWORD SWORD SWORD SWORD SWORD SWORDITY SWORD, SWORDITY SWORD SWORD. SWORD SWORD SWORD SWORDITY SWORD, SWORDITY SWORD SWORD SWORD GIRL, SWORDITY SWORD GIRL=

FIGHTER? CAN YOU HEAR ME FIGHTER?

EARTH TO FIGHTER. COME IN FIGHTER

I LOVE YOU PHALLIC-SWORD WORSHIPPING WARRIOR WOMAN TAKE ME

STRANGELY ENOUGH, I THINK GETTING VOTED OFF MAY HAVE BEEN THE BEST COMPLIMENT.

WE'RE GONNA BE LIGHT WARRIORS! YAAAAAAAAAY!!!
MUST RESIST URGE TO DESTROY IMBECILES. MUST USE THEM TO ADVANCE OWN GOALS.
HIYA...
MUST NOT STARE AT HER RACK. MUST MAINTAIN EYE CONTACT...
MMMM, SMACKTRAYS!
EXCUSE ME?
OH, YOU KNOW IT'S A FAIRLY CRUDE TERM FOR 'MELONS'- EEEEEEEEEP!
(B.M.'S BRAIN)
THINK BEFORE YOU TALK, YOU SLOBBERING DOLT!
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REALLY? I HADN'T HEARD OF THAT ONE BEFORE. MUST BE A LOCAL TERM THAT GREW OUT OF THE FARMING TRADITION HERE
YES! AGRICULTURE! THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I WAS TALKING ABOUT AND DEFINITELY NOT SOME OF THE MOST INTERESTING PARTS OF THE FEMALE ANATOMY
OKAAAAAAY. ANYWAY, I GUESS THIS IS GOODBYE
YEAH...
WELL, IT WAS CERTAINLY UM..
NICE? FUN? INTERESTING? TOLERABLE? WORTHWHILE? ER...
... AN EXPERIENCE MEETING YOU AND THE OTHERS. I DON'T THINK I'LL BE ABLE TO FORGET YOU ALL.
WAIT! WI... I EVER SEE YOU AGAIN?
OH, YOU NEVER KNOW. SINCE I'M A MEMBER OF A SECRET CABAL OF HEALERS WHO ARE FORETOLD TO MEND THE WORLD AFTER A GREAT EVIL HAS SWEPT ACROSS ITS SURFACE AND LAID WASTE TO THE WORKS OF MAN, WE MIGHT BUMP INTO EACH OTHER IN OUR TRAVELS.
BUT I PROBABLY SHOULDN'T HAVE TOLD YOU ABOUT ALL THAT JUST NOW
I'M SORRY, WHAT? I HAVEN'T HEARD A WORD YOU SAID 'CAUSE I WAS STARING AT YOUR GAZONGAS.

WELL GUYS, BE SEEIN' YA. CIAO.
BYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYE!
Y'KNOW, IT'S A SHAME THAT SHE COULDN'T COME WITH US.
GRRR.
WELL, IT HAD TO BE ONE OF US... ER, NOT ONE OF US REALLY SINCE MAGE AND FIGHTER SEEM DESTINED TO TEAM UP
GRRRR!
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..SO IT ONLY CAME DOWN TO HER AND RED MAGE IN THE END
BUT IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT, THAT'S NO CHOICE. AFTER ALL, I AM...
MAGE!
HEY, WE NEVER DID FIND OUT WHO BLACK MAGE WANTED TO JOIN OUR TEAM. NOT THAT IT MATTERS NOW
RAGE BOILING OVER...
WAS IT WHITE MAGE?
FURY.. SEETHING
DO YOU LIKE HER, OR LIKE HER LIKE HER?
DIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIE!
LUCKILY, I AM MOST SKILLED IN RUNNING THE HELL AWAY
YA DAMN RIGHT!

AND SO, AS THE WARRIORS OF LIGHT GATHER THEIR STRENGTH.
DIE, PITIFUL HALF-MEN!
SO TOO DOES A WARRIOR OF DARKNESS..
YES, SOON THE PLANETS SHALL BE IN ALIGNMENT WITH THE LEY LINES OF EVIL AND I WILL BE ABLE TO USHER IN A NEW ERA OF PAINFUL. ERM, SUFFERING AND UH.. DISCOMFORT IN GENERAL
LORD CHAOS, BLESS THIS UNHOLY LAIR OF DARKNESS
GOD, YOU'RE BAD AT THIS.
THIS IS PART OF MY TORTURE ISN'T IT.
SILENCE, HOSTAGE WENCH! COWER BEFORE MY DARK POWERS OF UNPLEASANTNESS!
GRAH! I AM GARLAND THE EVIL ER. BAD GUY ADVERSARY PERSON. YEAH
LORD CHAOS, BLESS THIS UNHOLY LAIR OF DARKNESS
RIIIGHT
YOU WILL PAY FOR YOUR INSOLENCE, PRINCESS FOR WHEN I SUMMON THE DARK LORD CHAOS TO DO MY BIDDING. MY VERY FIRST UH BID WILL BE TO HURRRRRT YOU HURRRRT YOU!
WHAT'RE YOU GONNA HAVE HIM DO? POKE ME IN THE RIBS?
LORD CHAOS
OH HEAVENS NO I'M NEFARIOUS NOT CRUEL
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AH YES, THE OL' BAD GUY OUTFIT STILL FITS LIKE A CHARM. NOT MANY ARCH-FIENDS CAN SAY THAT
BY BAHAMUT'S FLAME, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
EEEK!
DON'T YOU KNOCK?
WHAT'S WITH THAT GET UP?
IT'S MY BAD GUY OUTFIT. I WAS TRYING IT ON TO MAKE SURE IT STILL FITS. AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, I'VE STILL GOT MY SLIM NEFARIOUS FIGURE
I KNOW I'M GOING TO REGRET THIS, BUT I HAVE TO ASK. WHY ARE YOU TRYING IT ON?
WELL, THE LIGHT WARRIORS WILL BE HERE SOON TO RESCUE YOU. I WANT TO MAKE SURE I LOOK GOOD FOR WHEN THEY GET HERE TO DIE.
YOU VILLAINS ARE SO WEIRD
HEY, YOU TAKE THAT BACK! AND HOW D YOU GET IN HERE ANYWAY? YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE MY PRISONER. SHOULDN'T YOU BE LOCKED UP IN A DUNGEON OR SOMETHING?
PROBABLY BUT, AS I SAID BEFORE, YOU'RE BAD AT THIS.
GEEZ. RUB IT IN WHY DON'T YA
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HEH, GOLDEN GIRLS. BLANCH, YOU'RE ONLY AS OLD AS YOU FEEL.
BARRY'S CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL OF ARCH-VILLAINY
Garland
Y'KNOW, I'VE BEEN KIDNAPPED ABOUT HALF A DOZEN TIMES AND THIS IS BY FAR THE MOST INEPT JOB I'VE SEEN.
REALLY?
EVEN THE FOREST IMPS, WHO HAVE NO ACTUAL LANGUAGE WERE ABLE TO KEEP ME FROM WANDERING AROUND THEIR TERRITORY
DAMN YOU, FOREST IMPS! YOU'VE BEEN A THORN IN MY SIDE - FOR TOO LONG! - YOU WILL PAY. OH YES,
THE FRONT DOOR IS UNLOCKED, THE BACK DOOR IS WIDE OPEN, AND YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE A MAZE OR SWITCHES OR ANYTHING. I COULD'VE LEFT AT ANY TIME. ARE YOU EVEN TRYING?
HEY, I'VE GOT AN IDEA! SINCE YOU'RE SO EXPERIENCED WITH THIS WHOLE KIDNAPPING THING, WHY DON'T YOU KINDA HELP ME OUT?
WELL, ORDINARILY I DON'T LIKE ASSISTING FOUL SERVANTS OF THE DARK IN THEIR VILE PLOTS TO RAIN DESTRUCTION UPON ALL THE WORLD..
AWW NERTS! (PARDON MY LANGUAGE)
..BUT IF SOMETHING'S WORTH DOING, THEN IT'S WORTH DOING RIGHT
BARRY'S CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL OF ARCH-VILLAINY
YAAAY!
SUCKER
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WHY ARE WE RUNNING? HE'S ONLY A BLACK MAGE HE COULDN'T POSSIBLY HURT US.
I'M A THIEF, I CAN ONLY WEAR LEATHER ARMOR. ONE OF YOU GUYS TAKE THE HIT
UH.. DUE TO MY DUAL CLASS NATURE, I CAN ONLY WEAR LIGHT ARMOR. FIGHTER'S GOT THE BEST DICE POOL FOR SOAKING ANYWAY, SO HE SHOULD DO IT
I'M GOING TO KILL ALL OF YOU UNTIL YOU'RE DEAD!
I DON'T MIND. I'VE BEEN STABBED BY BLACK MAGE LOTS OF TIMES. USUALLY IN MY SLEEP ANYWAY, IT'S NOT THAT BAD
YEEARGHBLE!
CAN!
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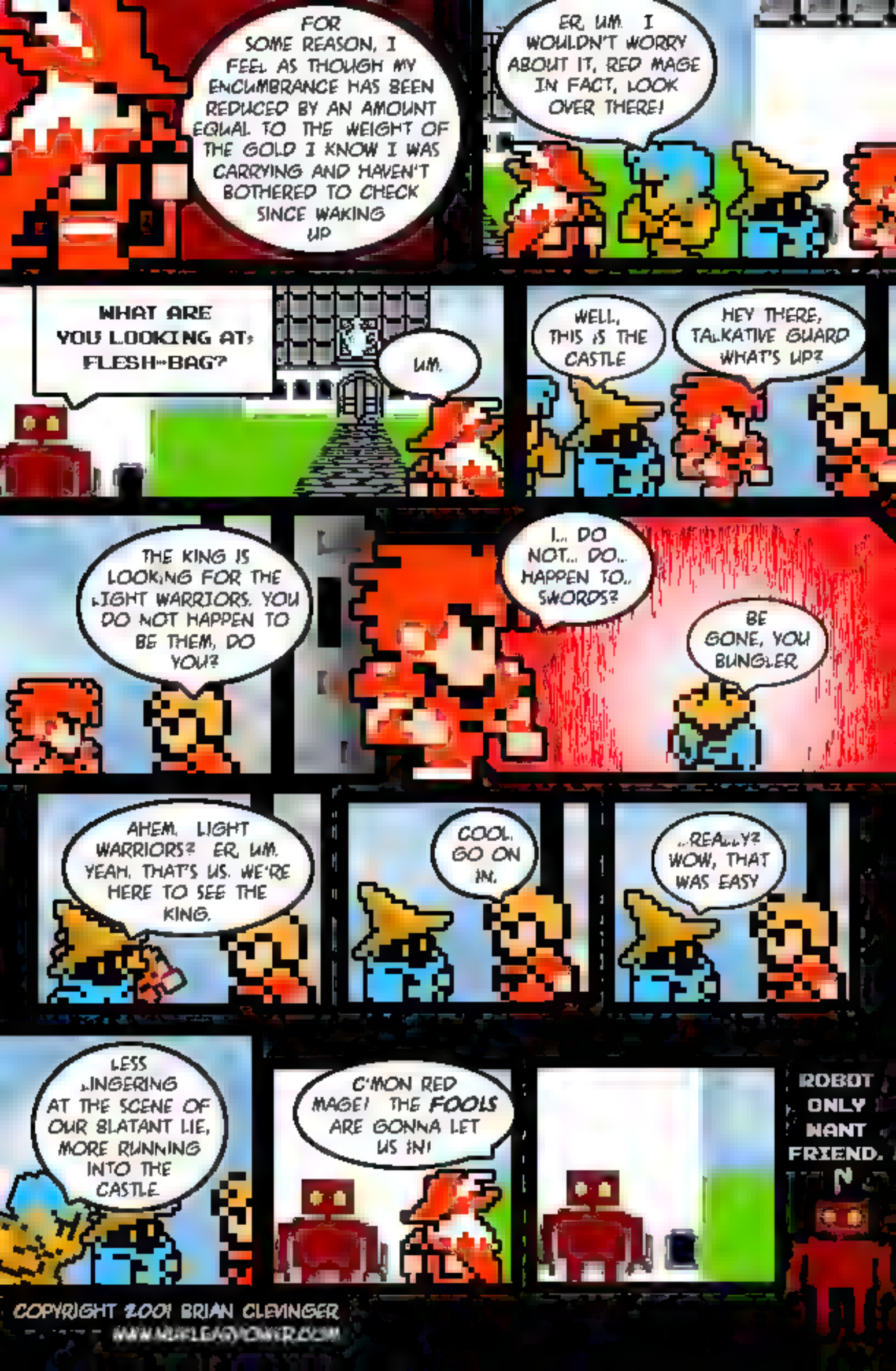
TINK
AW HELL. STABBING NEVER WORKS!
IT'S ALL IN THE WRIST. YOUR DOWNWARD STABBING MOTION LOSES TOO MUCH LEVERAGE. YOU HAVE TO START LOW AND STAB UP, Y'SEE.
HMM, YES. I'LL KEEP THAT IN MIND FROM NOW ON.
MAYBE WE SHOULD LEVEL UP A LITTLE BEFORE SEEING THE KING SO HE KNOWS WE'RE SERIOUS ABOUT THIS LIGHT WARRIOR GIG.
LEVEL UP TO GAIN POWER OR MEET WITH THE KING TO GAIN STATUS AND LORD OVER NEWBIES AND IMPRESS GIRLS ...GHKKK!
THUD!
I BET HE PROBABLY FAINTED FROM EXERTION, WHAT WITH CARRYING AROUND ALL THESE ITEMS THAT ARE HEAVY WITH UM... VALUE I SHOULD LIBERATE THEM, ER, FOR HIS OWN GOOD OF COURSE.
I THOUGHT I HEARD HIM SAY "MUNCHKIN OVERLOAD"
DID HE JUST FAINT?


FOR SOME REASON, I FEEL AS THOUGH MY ENCUMBRANCE HAS BEEN REDUCED BY AN AMOUNT EQUAL TO THE WEIGHT OF THE GOLD I KNOW I WAS CARRYING AND HAVEN'T BOTHERED TO CHECK SINCE WAKING UP
ER, UM. I WOULDN'T WORRY ABOUT IT, RED MAGE IN FACT, LOOK OVER THERE!
WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT, FLESH-BAG?
UM.
WELL, THIS IS THE CASTLE
HEY THERE, TALKATIVE GUARD WHAT'S UP?
THE KING IS LOOKING FOR THE LIGHT WARRIORS. YOU DO NOT HAPPEN TO BE THEM, DO YOU?
I... DO NOT... DO.. HAPPEN TO.. SWORDS?
BE GONE, YOU BUNGLER
AHEM. LIGHT WARRIORS? ER, UM. YEAH, THAT'S US. WE'RE HERE TO SEE THE KING.
COOL. GO ON IN.
..REALLY? WOW, THAT WAS EASY
LESS LINGERING AT THE SCENE OF OUR BLATANT LIE, MORE RUNNING INTO THE CASTLE
C'MON RED MAGE! THE FOOLS ARE GONNA LET US IN!
ROBOT ONLY WANT FRIEND.
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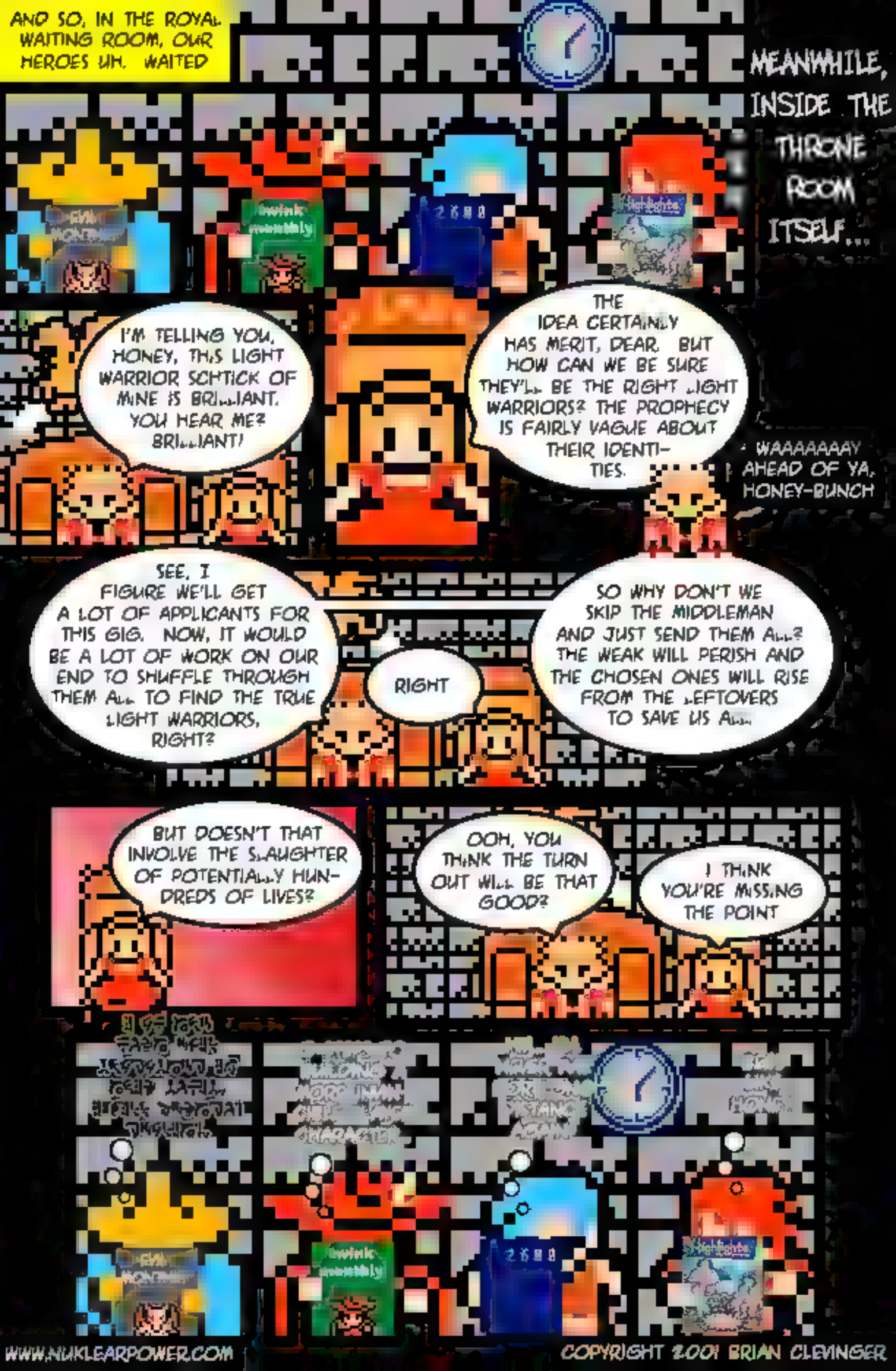
AND SO, IN THE ROYAL WAITING ROOM, OUR HEROES UH. WAITED
MEANWHILE, INSIDE THE THRONE ROOM ITSELF...
I'M TELLING YOU, HONEY, THIS LIGHT WARRIOR SCHTICK OF MINE IS BRILLIANT. YOU HEAR ME? BRILLIANT!
THE IDEA CERTAINLY HAS MERIT, DEAR. BUT HOW CAN WE BE SURE THEY'LL BE THE RIGHT LIGHT WARRIORS? THE PROPHECY IS FAIRLY VAGUE ABOUT THEIR IDENTITIES.
WAAAAAAAY AHEAD OF YA, HONEY-BUNCH
SEE, I FIGURE WE'LL GET A LOT OF APPLICANTS FOR THIS GIG. NOW, IT WOULD BE A LOT OF WORK ON OUR END TO SHUFFLE THROUGH THEM ALL TO FIND THE TRUE LIGHT WARRIORS, RIGHT?
RIGHT
SO WHY DON'T WE SKIP THE MIDDLEMAN AND JUST SEND THEM ALL? THE WEAK WILL PERISH AND THE CHOSEN ONES WILL RISE FROM THE LEFTOVERS TO SAVE US ALL
BUT DOESN'T THAT INVOLVE THE SLAUGHTER OF POTENTIALLY HUNDREDS OF LIVES?
OOH, YOU THINK THE TURN OUT WILL BE THAT GOOD?
I THINK YOU'RE MISSING THE POINT
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WE'RE THE LIGHT WARRIORS AND STUFF WE HAVE AN APPOINTMENT TO MEET WITH THE KING. IT'S A MATTER OF GLOBAL IMPORTANCE TOP SECRET STUFF
ARE YOU SURE YOU GUYS ARE THE LIGHT WARRIORS? YOUR APPOINTMENT ISN'T FOR ANOTHER HOUR.
MAGAZINES
THIS IS A MATTER OF DESTINY! WE HAVEN'T TIME FOR YOUR PETTY LITTLE 'SCHEDULES!' LIVES ARE AT STAKE! THE FATE OF THE WORLD HANGS IN THE BALANCE!
WELL IF YOU TRULY ARE THE LIGHT WARRIORS, THEN I'M GOING TO HAVE TO SEE YOUR ORBS OF LIGHT
OH LORD CHAOS, WHO ART IN HELL, PLEASE TELL ME I DON'T HAVE TO TAKE OFF MY ROBES FOR THIS HAG-BEAST.
AHEM. ORBS OF LIGHT, EH? AND THOSE ARE...
TSK. THE ORBS ARE A SIGN OF THE TRUE LIGHT WARRIORS. SO WHERE'S YOURS?
LET ME GET BACK TO YOU ON THAT, I
GUYS. I NEED A LADDER, AND I NEED IT NOW
THERE WAS A PAINTER OUTSIDE THIS VERY BUILDING. HE WAS ON A LADDER.
BE BACK IN A SECOND YOU!
I WONDER WHAT HE'S GOT IN MIND
HEY, WHAT'RE YOU DOING WITH THAT KNIFE? AROH! YOU'RE STABBING ME REPEATEDLY IN THE FACE! ARRGHBLE! WHY ARE YOU STABBING ME?! I SAID YOU COULD BORROW THE LADDER! THERE'S NO REASON TO ASSAULT ME! ARRRRROH!!! NOW YOU'RE KICKING ME AS I LAY BLEEDING IN THE STREETS IN BROAD DAYLIGHT WHILE EVERYONE CONTINUES TO WANDER ABOUT AIMLESSLY AS THOUGH YOU WERE NOT MERCILESSLY BEATING ME! OHKKK! NOW YOU'RE CHOCKING ME! VISION TUNNELING... CAN'T SEEM TO STAY AWAKE...
DUM DE DUM
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MAGAZINES
SO YEAH. THAT'S FOUR ORBS OF LIGHT DON'T TOUCH THEM, THEY ARE HOT. HOT WITH DESTINY!
WELL. THEY ARE ORBS. AND THEY ARE HOT
SEE? YOU CAN'T ARGUE WITH FATE NOW LET US SEE THE KING.
I'LL BUZZ YOU IN.
AND SO, IN THE THRONE ROOM...
SO YOU'RE SAYING THAT IF WE SEND EVERY LIGHT WARRIOR APPLICANT, IT WILL RESULT IN UNTOLD BLOODSHED AS THEIR WORTHLESS BODIES ARE SLAIN BY THE VAST ARMADAS OF EVIL LURKING IN THE SHADOWS OF OUR VAST, DANGEROUS WORLD?
YES.
AND THAT IS... BAD?
EXCUSE ME YOUR HIGHNESSES, THERE ARE SOME LIGHT WARRIORS HERE TO SEE YOU.
OH, DON'T BOTHER WITH THAT, CAROL. JUST SEND 'EM OUT INTO THE WILD TO BE SLAIN LIKE THE FODDER THEY NO DOUBT ARE.
NO NO NO! SEND THEM IN SO WE CAN INTERVIEW THEM FIRST
OH, RIGHT. WE'RE TRYING TO STOP SENSELESS AND RAMPANT DEATH. SORRY, HON. WON'T HAPPEN AGAIN, I PROMISE.
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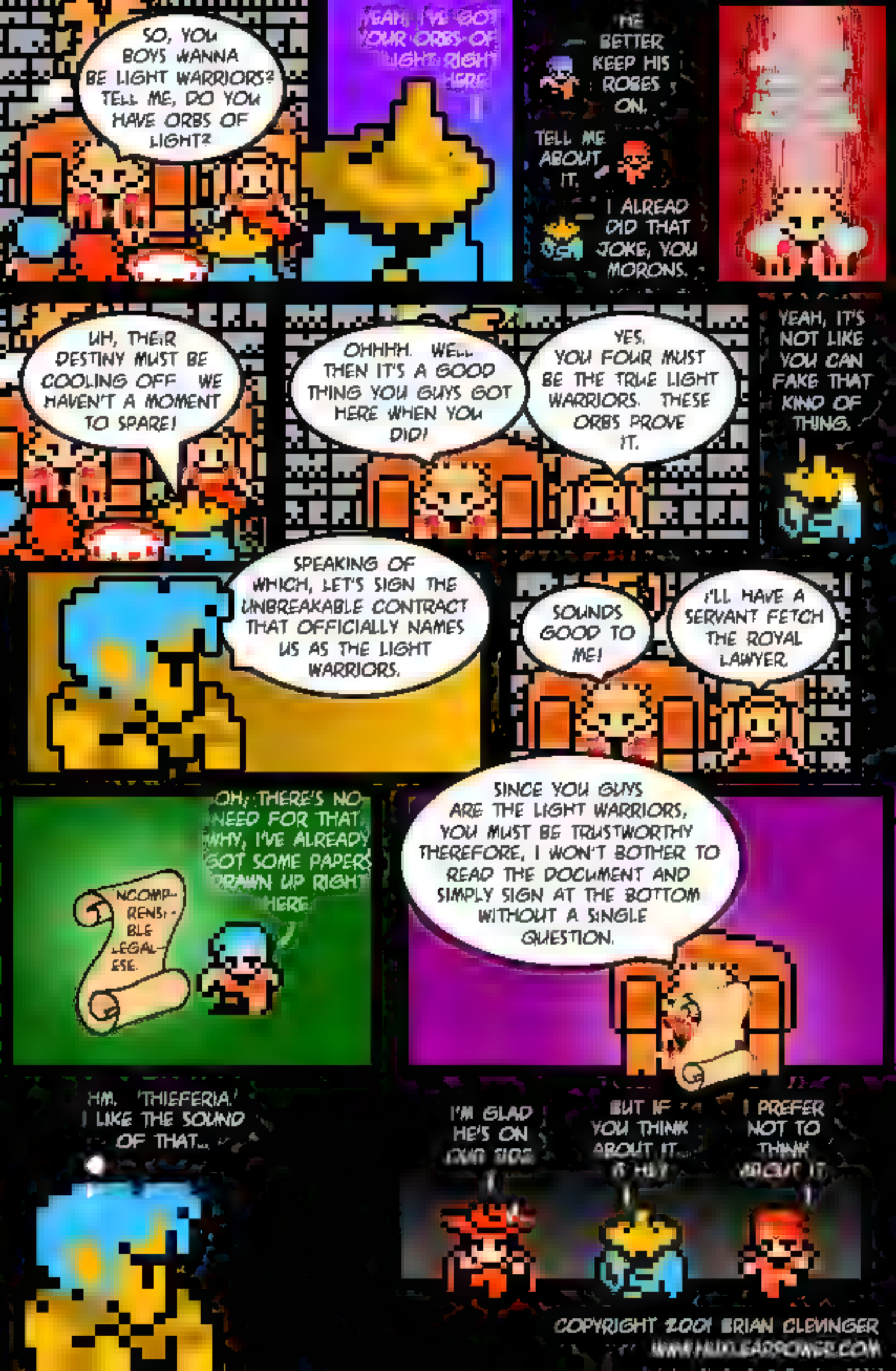
SO, YOU BOYS WANNA BE LIGHT WARRIORS? TELL ME, DO YOU HAVE ORBS OF LIGHT?
YEAH, I'VE GOT YOUR ORBS OF LIGHT RIGHT HERE
ME BETTER KEEP HIS ROBES ON.
TELL ME ABOUT IT.
I ALREAD DID THAT JOKE, YOU MORONS.
UH, THEIR DESTINY MUST BE COOLING OFF. WE HAVEN'T A MOMENT TO SPARE!
OHHHH. WELL... THEN IT'S A GOOD THING YOU GUYS GOT HERE WHEN YOU DID!
YES. YOU FOUR MUST BE THE TRUE LIGHT WARRIORS. THESE ORBS PROVE IT.
YEAH, IT'S NOT LIKE YOU CAN FAKE THAT KIND OF THING.
SPEAKING OF WHICH, LET'S SIGN THE UNBREAKABLE CONTRACT THAT OFFICIALLY NAMES US AS THE LIGHT WARRIORS.
SOUNDS GOOD TO ME!
I'LL HAVE A SERVANT FETCH THE ROYAL LAWYER.
OH, THERE'S NO NEED FOR THAT. WHY, I'VE ALREADY GOT SOME PAPERS DRAWN UP RIGHT HERE.
INCOMPRENSIBLE LEGALESE.
SINCE YOU GUYS ARE THE LIGHT WARRIORS, YOU MUST BE TRUSTWORTHY THEREFORE, I WON'T BOTHER TO READ THE DOCUMENT AND SIMPLY SIGN AT THE BOTTOM WITHOUT A SINGLE QUESTION.
HM. 'THIEFERIA.' I LIKE THE SOUND OF THAT...
I'M GLAD HE'S ON OUR SIDE
BUT IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT...
I PREFER NOT TO THINK ABOUT IT.
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SO YOUR KINGSHIP WHAT IS IT THAT WE'LL BE DOING AS LIGHT WARRIORS ANYWAY?
OH NOTHING TOO BAD YOU JUST HAVE TO DEFEAT CHAOS IS ALL
DEATH
CHAOS, THERE ARE NO RIGHT ONLY WORDS FOR THINGS WE CAN'T EVEN UNDERSTAND. CHAOS IS NOT SOMETHING YOU FIGHT AGAINST. CHAOS IS NOT SOMETHING YOU PROTECT. THEY HAVE NO MORE POWER OR SIGNIFICANCE THAN THAT WHICH WE GIVE THEM.
AND I FOR ONE WILL NOT PERPETUATE THIS ASININE PARADIGM THAT THERE IS SOMETHING INHERENTLY WRONG ABOUT CHAOS.
ER... I WAS TALKING ABOUT THE NEFARIOUS KING OF DEMONS, CHAOS NOT THE IDEA OF CHAOS
OHHHH, CHAOS WELL, THAT'S DIFFERENT THEN ISN'T IT WHEN DO WE START?

SO I ASSUME WE'LL HAVE THE FULL SUPPORT OF THE CORNERIAN ARMY TO BACK US UP RIGHT?
HMM. NOT SO MUCH.
IN THAT CASE, I'M SURE YOU'LL EQUIP US WITH A HORDE OF CORNERIA'S MOST POWERFUL ITEMS SO WE CAN HACK AND SLASH THROUGH EVERYTHING WITHOUT BREAKING A SWEAT. RIGHT?
+5
+3
YES. EXCEPT REPLACE THE PHRASE 'MOST POWERFUL' WITH 'WEAKEST' AND 'EQUIP YOU' WITH 'YOU'LL HAVE TO BUY'
BUT I'M SURE WE'LL BE BUYING THIS NEW EQUIPMENT WITH THE MASSIVE DOWN PAYMENT YOU'LL GIVE US FOR OUR REQUESTED SERVICES.
OH, OF COURSE. ONLY... NO.
LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT YOU WANT US TO RISK OUR LIVES TO SAVE YOUR KINGDOM AND YOU'RE NOT GOING TO OFFER US THE SLIGHTEST IOTA OF ASSISTANCE?
IT'S AWFULLY COST EFFECTIVE THOUGH!
NO NO NO NO! WHATEVER GAVE YOU THAT IDEA? IN FACT, WE HAVE EXTENSIVE INTELLIGENCE REGARDING GARLAND'S CURRENT LOCATION FROM OUR CRACK RECON TEAM.
WE'RE ONLY INTERN NINJAS.
NOW WE'RE GETTIN' SOMEWHERE. LAY THAT RECON INFO ON US, KING STEVE.
CONFER
EXPLAIN
WHISPER
GARLAND'S CASTLE IS NORTH. AND A LITTLE TO THE LEFT.
OR TO THE RIGHT
WE SORTA FORGOT TO WRITE IT DOWN SORRY.
YOU HAVE GOT TO BE KIDDING.
NINJAS USE SWORDS
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WELL. LOOKS LIKE WE'RE THE LIGHT WARRIORS NOW.
YUP! WHY, I CAN ALREADY FEEL MY DESTINY WARMING UP!
WHY DO I ALLOW YOU TO BREATHE? WHY?
I ALWAYS THOUGHT IT WAS MY WIT AND CANDOR
BEFORE WE SET OUT FOR SOME LEVELING UP, WE SHOULD POOL OUR MONEY TO INVEST IN SOME WEAPONS, ARMOR, ITEMS, AND SPELLS AND THEN STAY AT THE LOCAL INN.
GOOD IDEA, RED MAGE
PLUS, IT'LL GIVE ME TIME TO TAKE CARE OF SOME BUSINESS.
JUST BECAUSE YOU FACE THE OTHER WAY DOESN'T MEAN WE CAN'T STILL HEAR YOU.
ER AS YOUR LEADER, I COMMAND YOU ALL TO FORGET WHAT I JUST SAID
WAIT, YOU MEAN WE SHOULD FORGET TO FORGET WHAT YOU SAID, OR WE SHOULD FORGET THE PART BEFORE THAT WHICH I HAVE ALREADY FORGOTTEN SINCE IT DIDN'T INVOLVE SWORDS AND IS THEREFORE MEANINGLESS?
WHY DO YOU ALLOW HIM TO BREATHE?
WELL, REALLY IT ALL COMES DOWN TO THIS. HEY, FIGHTER.
YOU'VE GOT A GIANT SPIDER ON YOUR FACE!
AUGH! GET IT OFF! IT'S IN MY HAIR, IT'S IN MY HAAAAIIIIR!!!
HEH. YEAH, THAT IS PRETTY COOL.
WOW. BY THE METERS/TURN EQUATION, HE'S GOT A PRETTY HIGH DEXTERITY SCORE
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OKAY, LET'S SPLIT UP SO WE CAN GET EVERYTHING DONE SOONER.
RUN FOR THE HILLS! YOUR SWORDS, AS SHINY AS THEY MAY BE, ARE POWERLESS AGAINST THE SPIDER'S WRATH!
YEAH, ANYWAY I SHOULD GO GET THE WEAPONS AND ARMOR SINCE I'VE GOT THE STATS FOR EVERY SINGLE ONE IN THE GAME MEMORIZED.
THE INVISIBLE SPIDER GOD WILL SMITE US ALL! NO ONE IS SAFE! ALL IS DOOMED!
I'LL BE AT THE LOCAL YE OLDE PAWNE SHOPPE SELLING THIS KINGDOM'S RICHES BACK TO ITSELF.
WELL, I'M LAZY AS HELL SO I'LL GO CHECK OUT THE INN AND TEST THE BEDS WITH COPIOUS AMOUNTS OF NAPPING. LET'S MEET UP THERE BY SUN DOWN TO REST UP BEFORE HEADING OUT.
THE BLACK APOCOLYPTIC SKIES RAIN WITH SPIDERY DEATH! WHY HATH YE GODS FORESAKEN US! WHYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!
IS THERE AN OFF BUTTON FOR THAT THING?
OH, HE PASSES OUT AFTER A WHILE.
YOU KNOW, MY BACKSTAB ATTACK DOES DOUBLE DAMAGE I COULD MAKE AN OFF BUTTON FOR HIM.
YOUR IDEAS INTRIGUE ME AND I WISH TO LEARN MORE.
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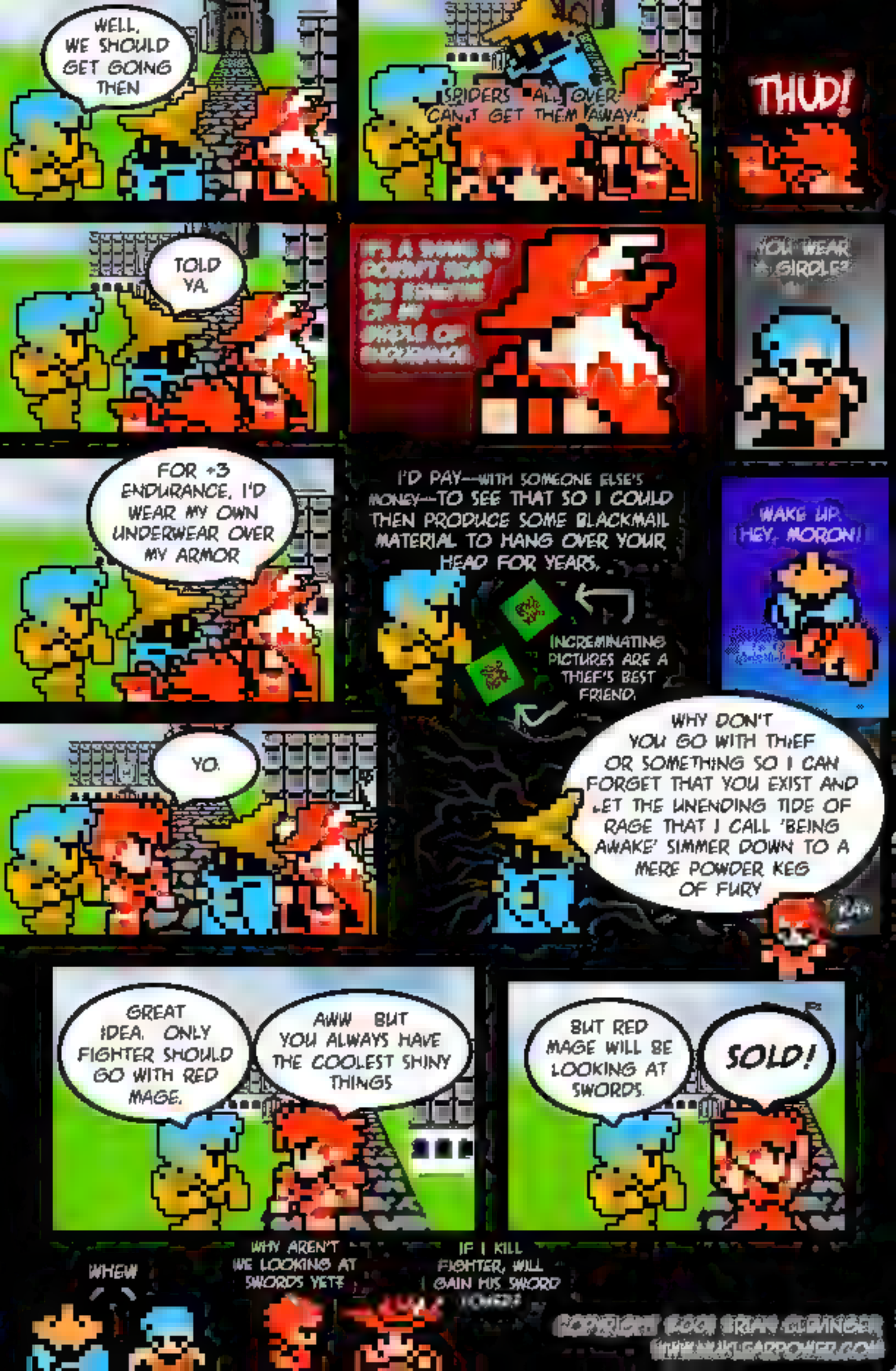
WELL, WE SHOULD GET GOING THEN
SPIDERS ALL OVER CAN'T GET THEM AWAY!!
THUD!
TOLD YA.
IT'S A SHAME NO POINT WAS SPENT ON KNOWING OF MY WEAKNESS OF SPIDERS
YOU WEAR A GIRDLE?
FOR +3 ENDURANCE, I'D WEAR MY OWN UNDERWEAR OVER MY ARMOR
I'D PAY—WITH SOMEONE ELSE'S MONEY—TO SEE THAT SO I COULD THEN PRODUCE SOME BLACKMAIL MATERIAL TO HANG OVER YOUR HEAD FOR YEARS.
INCRIMINATING PICTURES ARE A THIEF'S BEST FRIEND.
WAKE UP. HEY, MORON!
YO.
WHY DON'T YOU GO WITH THIEF OR SOMETHING SO I CAN FORGET THAT YOU EXIST AND LET THE UNENDING TIDE OF RAGE THAT I CALL 'BEING AWAKE' SIMMER DOWN TO A MERE POWDER KEG OF FURY
GREAT IDEA. ONLY FIGHTER SHOULD GO WITH RED MAGE.
AWW BUT YOU ALWAYS HAVE THE COOLEST SHINY THINGS
BUT RED MAGE WILL BE LOOKING AT SWORDS.
SOLD!
WHEW
WHY AREN'T WE LOOKING AT SWORDS YET?
IF I KILL FIGHTER, WILL I GAIN HIS SWORD POWER?
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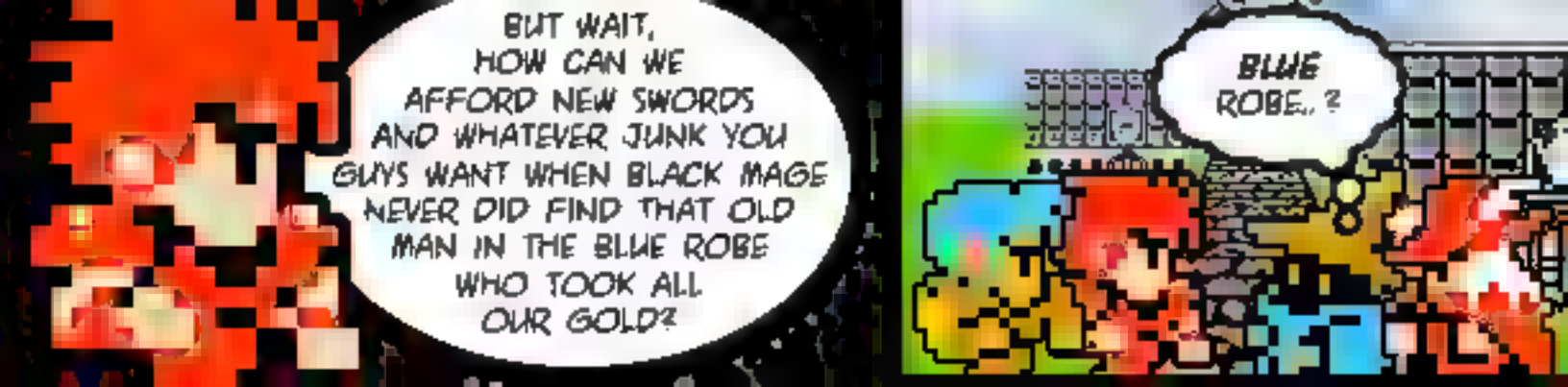
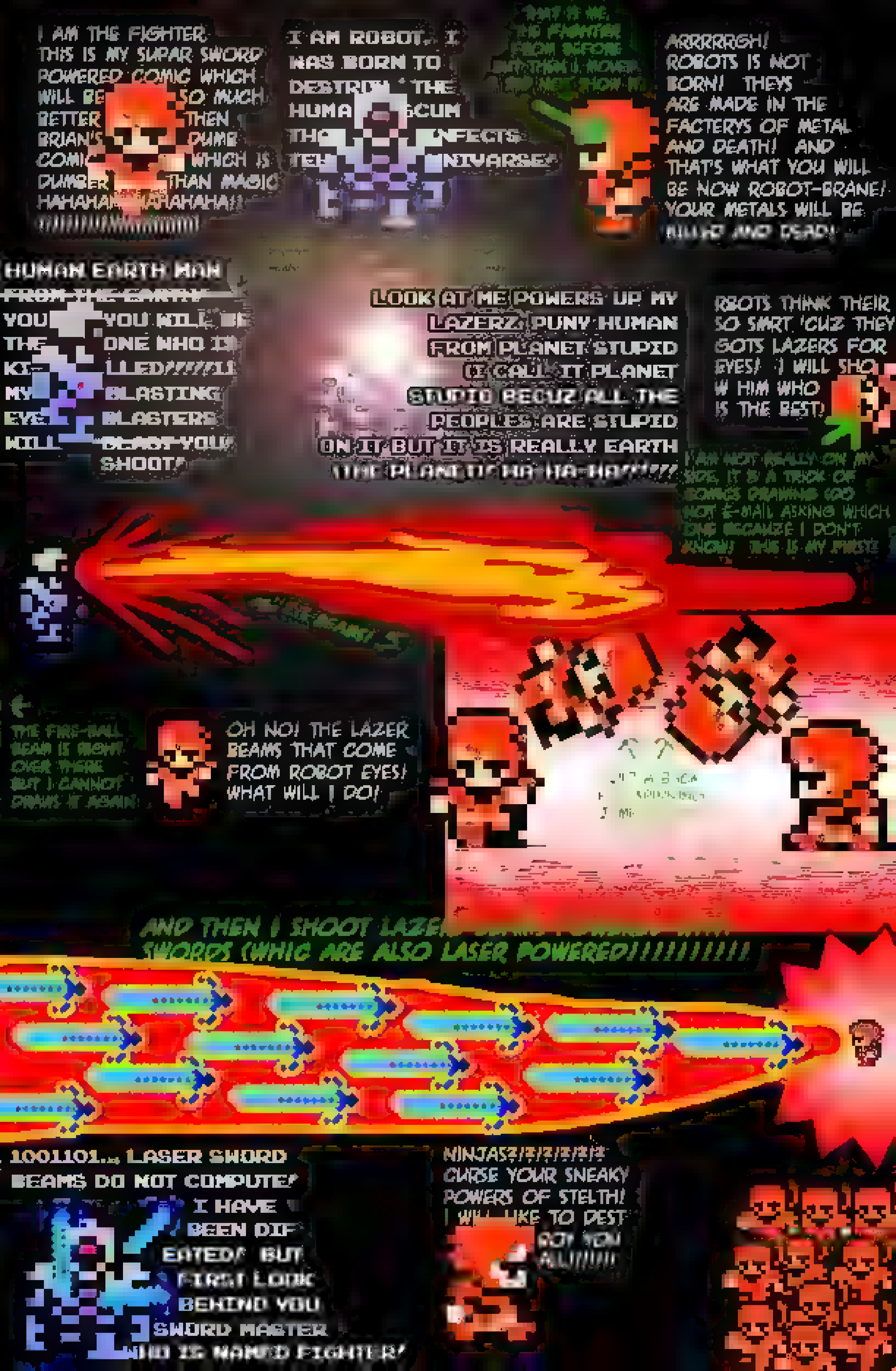

BUT WAIT, HOW CAN WE AFFORD NEW SWORDS AND WHATEVER JUNK YOU GUYS WANT WHEN BLACK MAGE NEVER DID FIND THAT OLD MAN IN THE BLUE ROBE WHO TOOK ALL OUR GOLD?
BLUE ROBE..?

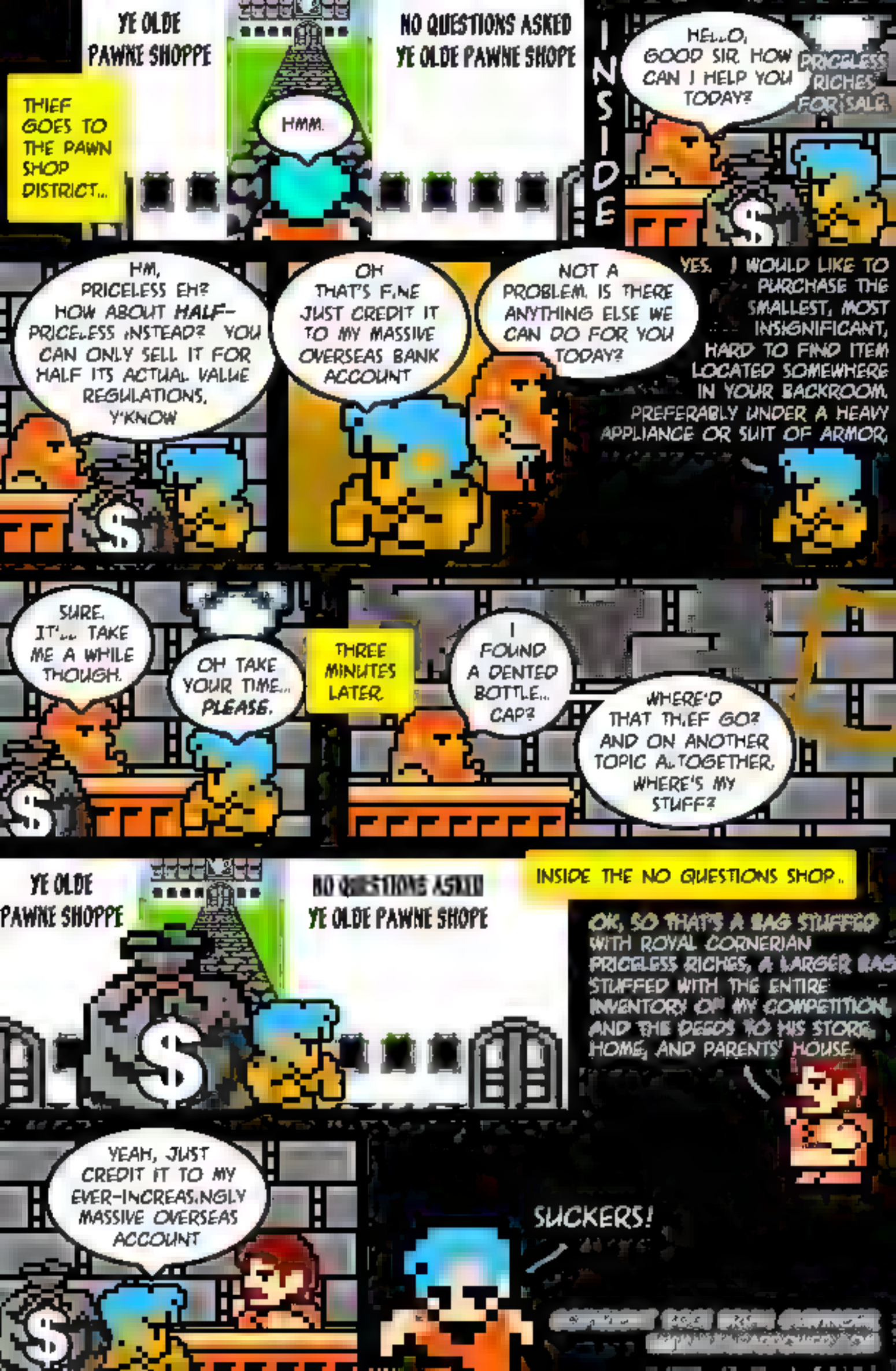
FIGHTER AND RED MAGE GO TO THE WEAPON STORE..
CAN I HELP YOU BOYS?
NOW WHAT IS IT THAT I WANT?
YEAH, I'D LIKE TWO EXCALIBURS, MASAMUNE, AN ASSASSIN'S DAGGER, HALF A DOZEN AEGIS SHIELDS (WE STRAP THE EXTRAS TO OUR BACKS TO IMPROVE REAR AC VALUE), TWO SETS OF CRYSTAL ARMOR, ONE SET OF SILENT RING MAIL, A ROBE OF DARKNESS, FOUR GAUNTLETS OF GIANT'S STRENGTH, FOUR HELMETS OF INVISIBILITY, AND FOUR PAIRS OF ALACRITUS'S BOOTS OF SPEED.
I'VE GOT TWO WOODEN SWORDS, A WOODEN SWORD MY TODDLER SON BROKE WHICH COULD PASS AS A DAGGER, AND A FEW SETS OF WOODEN HALF ARMOR WHICH ARE ALL VERY NOISY AND DANGEROUS TO THOSE WHO WEAR THEM DUE TO SPLINTERS AND CHAFFING.
IT HAD TO DO WITH SOMETHING.
OF COURSE
DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING MADE OUT OF METAL?
I'M PRETTY SURE IT HAD TO BE PRINY.
WHY WOULD YOU HAVE ANY KIND OF NUNCHUCKS?! THIS IS A WESTERN STYLE MEDIEVAL SETTING! THERE AREN'T ANY MONKS OR MARTIAL ARTISTS WITHIN FIVE GENRES OF HERE!
SWORD-CHUCKS, YO!
WHY DO YOU THINK I STILL GOT A WHOLE CRATE OF 'EM?
TOUCHÉ
NUNCHUCKS, EH? THAT GIVES ME THE MOST SMARTEST IDEA EVER!
THAT IS THE WORST IDEA ANYONE HAS EVER HAD
AND HOW WOULD YOU HOLD THEM ANYWAY?
I'D BE LIKE BRUCE LEE MEETS MUSASHI! ONLY BETTER! GOD, I'M SO BRILLIANT!

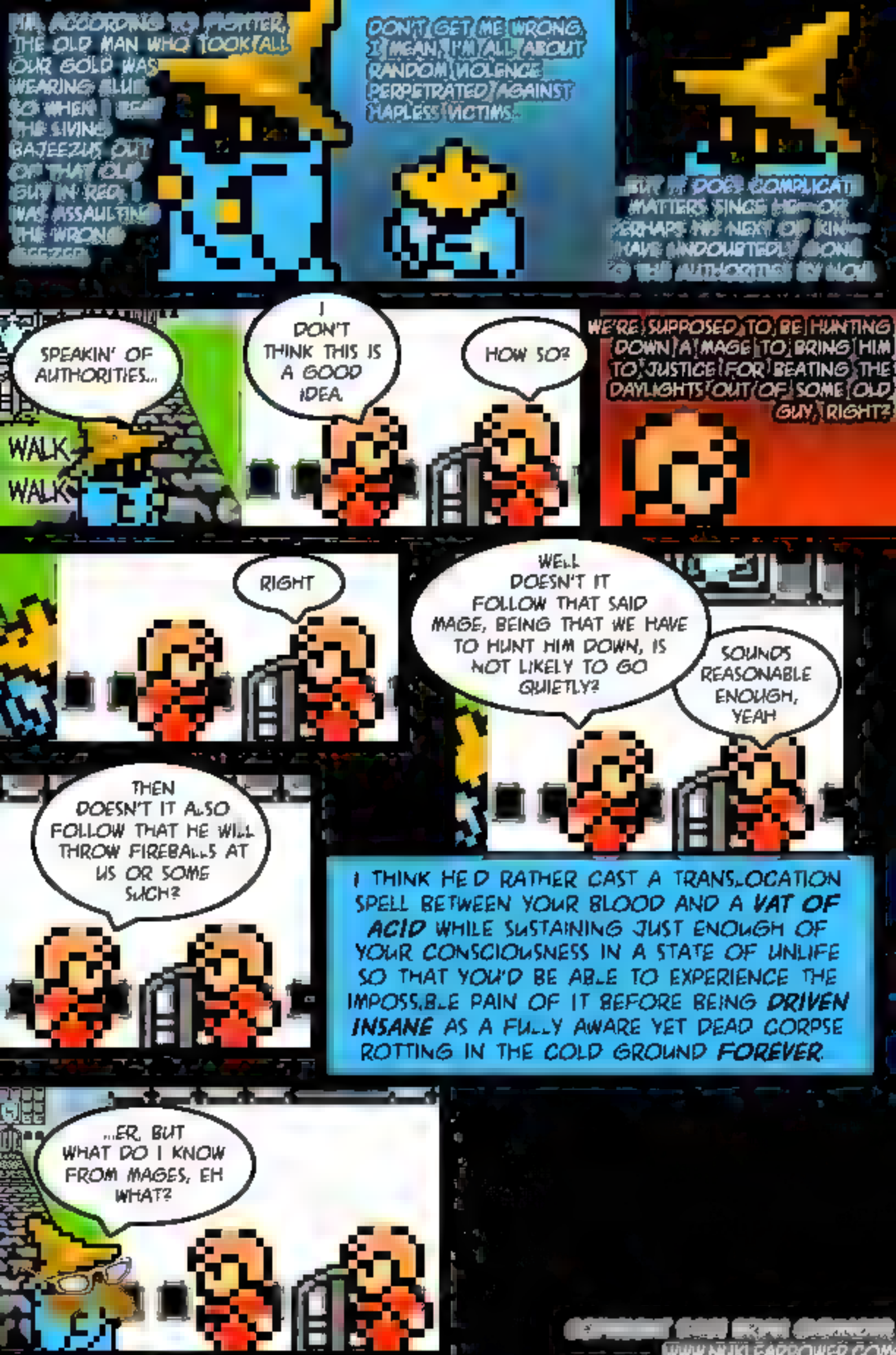
WE NOW TREAT YOU TO AN EXCLUSIVE* BEHIND THE SCENES LOOK AT THE MAKING OF
8-BIT THEATER.
*"EXCLUSIVE" REFERS TO ANYONE WHO CAN GET ONLINE
HILARITY PROGRAM INITIATED
GET TO 8-BIT.
GENERATING COMIC.....
FGHTR: DUMB
BMAG: EVIL
THIEF: GREED
RMAG: TWINK
AUDIENCE
IDENTIFIES...
95%
EXXXCELLENT
HELLO, I'M BRIAN CLEVINGER. YOU MAY REMEMBER ME FROM SUCH WEBCOMICS AS 8-BIT THEATER, 8-BIT THEATER 2: THE REVENGE, AND 8-BIT THEATER 3: THIS TIME IT'S PERSONAL. I'M HERE TO TELL YOU READERS ABOUT THIS WEEK'S COMICS.
WRITER'S SENSE TINGLING
YOU SEE, I'M WORKING FULL TIME THIS WEEK. WE WILL CALL THIS 'HELL WEEK' BECAUSE I'M IN ALABAMA.
AND ALABAMA IS HELL
LUCKILY, IN A TWIST NO ONE COULD HAVE FORESEEN UNLESS THEY READ FAMILY CIRCUS, FIGHTER HAS STEPPED UP TO PROVIDE YOU WITH HIS OWN ORIGINAL COMICS.
ANYWAY, ANOTHER ADVANTAGE OF THIS SITUATION IS THAT BLACK MAGE WON'T HAVE TO PUT UP WITH FIGHTER FOR A WHOLE WEEK.
WELL, I'M OUTTA HERE GOTTA WORK ON THOSE COMICS, YO!
SHALL WE?
LET'S.



I AM THE FIGHTER THIS IS MY SUPAR SWORD POWERED COMIC WHICH WILL BE SO MUCH BETTER THEN BRIAN'S DUMB COMIC WHICH IS DUMBER THAN MAGIC HAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
I AM ROBOT. I WAS BORN TO DESTROY THE HUMAN SCUM THAT INFECTS THE UNIVARSE!
ARRRRRGH! ROBOTS IS NOT BORN! THEYS ARE MADE IN THE FACTERYS OF METAL AND DEATH! AND THAT'S WHAT YOU WILL BE NOW ROBOT-BRANE! YOUR METALS WILL BE KILLED AND DEAD!
HUMAN EARTH MAN FROM THE EARTH! YOU YOU WILL BE THE ONE WHO IS KILLED!!!!!!11 MY BLASTING EYE BLASTERS WILL SHOOT!
LOOK AT ME POWERS UP MY LAZERZ PUNY HUMAN FROM PLANET STUPID (I CALL IT PLANET STUPID BECUZ ALL THE PEOPLES ARE STUPID ON IT BUT IT IS REALLY EARTH THE PLANET) HA-HA-HA!!!!!!
RBOTS THINK THEIR SO SMRT 'CUZ THEY GOTS LAZERS FOR EYES! I WILL SHOW HIM WHO IS THE BEST!
I AM NOT REALLY ON MY SIDE. IT IS A TRICK OF COMICS DRAWING (DO NOT E-MAIL ASKING WHICH ONE BECAUZE I DON'T KNOW! THIS IS MY FIRST!
THE FIRE-BALL BEAM IS SHOWN OVER THERE BUT I CANNOT DRAWS IT AGAIN!
OH NO! THE LAZER BEAMS THAT COME FROM ROBOT EYES! WHAT WILL I DO!
AND THEN I SHOOT LAZER... SWORDS (WHIC ARE ALSO LASER POWERED)!!!!!!!!!!
1001101... LASER SWORD BEAMS DO NOT COMPUTE! I HAVE BEEN DEFEATED! BUT FIRST LOOK BEHIND YOU SWORD MASTER WHO IS NAMED FIGHTER!
NINJAS?!?!?!?!?!?! CURSE YOUR SNEAKY POWERS OF STELTH! I WILL LIKE TO DESTROY YOU ALL!!!!!!!

WE ARE NINJAS AND WE OOZE THE THE POWER OF SHADOWS!!!
THE SHADOWS WON'T BLEND IN WITH THE BLACK BACKGROUND BUT THEY ARE THEIR!
HAHAHAHAHAHA! STUPID NINJAS, YOU THINK THAT YOU ARE MORE THEN FIGH ALL OF LITTLE
YOU INTO PARTS!
I AM THE BOSS OF THE NINJAS! THEY WILL FIGHT YOU TO THE DEATH
I MEANT TO WRITE 'BOSS' BUT I CANNOT UNDO THE WORDS.
YAAAAAAR! ALL OF THE NINJAS MUST DIIIE!!!!!!
NOT IF YOU ARE THE FIRST ONE WHO IS DIE BE
FIRST TO CAUSE OF OUR SHARP NINJA BLADES WHICH ARE ON FIRE!!!!!!!
I COULD NOT DRAW IT, BUT YOU CAN IMAGINE THE FIRE. (IT IS DANGEROUS.)
I KNOW MY ARMY OF INVINCABLE NINJAS WILL KILL THE WEAK FIGHTER BECAUSE THEY
HAHAHAHA
HAHAHAHA
HAHAHAHAHAHA
HAHA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
NINJAS ARE TOO SLOW FOR ME BECAUSE I MOVE AT THE SPEED OF SWORDS---IT IS TWICE AS FAST AS LIGHT YOU CAN LOOK IT UP BUT I DON'T KNOW WHERE SO DON'T ASK---THAT IS WHY YOU SEE MY SWORD BLUR LIKE THAT. RED MAGE JUST TOLD ME IT LOOKS LIKE I HAVE A VV AGAINST EVIL NINJAS AND IT IS GOOD.
THE NINJAS DON'T KNOWS IT YET, BUT THEY'RE HEADS ARE ABOUT TO EXPLODE FROM MY ULTIMATE SWROD TECHNIQUE! WAIT FOR IT!
FIGHTER, YOU HAVE ONE TINY BATTLE BUT THERE IS ONE RULE FOR THE UNIVERSE AND THAT RULE IS THAT THERE IS ALAWAYS MORE NINJA!
THIS IS THE SMOKE FILLED PANEL WHERE THE NINJA BOSS DISAPEARS AND THAT IS WHY YOU CAN NOT SEES HIM IN IT! I THINK THAT IS SO CLEVAR!
OH YEAH SNEAKY NANINJA BOSS? WELL I HAPPEN TO KNOW ANOTHER RULE OF THE INFINITE UNIVERSE! AND THAT RULE IS THAT THERE IS ALWAYS MORE SWORDS TO KILL NINJAS WITH!!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS BUT IT IS TEH TRUTH!!


YE OLDE PAWNE SHOPPE
NO QUESTIONS ASKED YE OLDE PAWNE SHOPE
THIEF GOES TO THE PAWN SHOP DISTRICT...
HMM.
INSIDE
HELLO, GOOD SIR. HOW CAN I HELP YOU TODAY?
PRICELESS RICHES FOR SALE.
HM, PRICELESS EH? HOW ABOUT HALF-PRICELESS INSTEAD? YOU CAN ONLY SELL IT FOR HALF ITS ACTUAL VALUE REGULATIONS, Y'KNOW
OH THAT'S FINE JUST CREDIT IT TO MY MASSIVE OVERSEAS BANK ACCOUNT
NOT A PROBLEM. IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE WE CAN DO FOR YOU TODAY?
YES. I WOULD LIKE TO PURCHASE THE SMALLEST, MOST INSIGNIFICANT, HARD TO FIND ITEM LOCATED SOMEWHERE IN YOUR BACKROOM. PREFERABLY UNDER A HEAVY APPLIANCE OR SUIT OF ARMOR.
SURE. IT'... TAKE ME A WHILE THOUGH.
OH TAKE YOUR TIME... PLEASE.
THREE MINUTES LATER.
I FOUND A DENTED BOTTLE... CAP?
WHERE'D THAT THIEF GO? AND ON ANOTHER TOPIC ALTOGETHER, WHERE'S MY STUFF?
YE OLDE PAWNE SHOPPE
NO QUESTIONS ASKED
YE OLDE PAWNE SHOPE
INSIDE THE NO QUESTIONS SHOP..
OK, SO THAT'S A BAG STUFFED WITH ROYAL CORNERIAN PRICELESS RICHES, A LARGER BAG STUFFED WITH THE ENTIRE INVENTORY OF MY COMPETITION, AND THE DEEDS TO HIS STORE, HOME, AND PARENTS' HOUSE.
YEAH, JUST CREDIT IT TO MY EVER-INCREASINGLY MASSIVE OVERSEAS ACCOUNT
SUCKERS!


HM. ACCORDING TO MOTHER, THE OLD MAN WHO TOOK ALL OUR GOLD WAS WEARING BLUE. SO WHEN I BEAT THE LIVING BAJEEZUS OUT OF THAT OLD GUY IN RED, I WAS ASSAULTING THE WRONG
DON'T GET ME WRONG. I MEAN, I'M ALL ABOUT RANDOM VIOLENCE PERPETRATED AGAINST HAPLESS VICTIMS...
BUT IT DOES COMPLICATE MATTERS SINCE HE—OR PERHAPS THE NEXT OF KIN—HAVE UNDOUBTEDLY GONE TO THE AUTHORITIES BY NOW.
SPEAKIN' OF AUTHORITIES...
WALK
WALK
I DON'T THINK THIS IS A GOOD IDEA.
HOW SO?
WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE HUNTING DOWN A MAGE TO BRING HIM TO JUSTICE FOR BEATING THE DAYLIGHTS OUT OF SOME OLD GUY, RIGHT?
RIGHT
WELL DOESN'T IT FOLLOW THAT SAID MAGE, BEING THAT WE HAVE TO HUNT HIM DOWN, IS NOT LIKELY TO GO QUIETLY?
SOUNDS REASONABLE ENOUGH, YEAH
THEN DOESN'T IT ALSO FOLLOW THAT HE WILL THROW FIREBALLS AT US OR SOME SUCH?
I THINK HE'D RATHER CAST A TRANSLOCATION SPELL BETWEEN YOUR BLOOD AND A VAT OF ACID WHILE SUSTAINING JUST ENOUGH OF YOUR CONSCIOUSNESS IN A STATE OF UNLIFE SO THAT YOU'D BE ABLE TO EXPERIENCE THE IMPOSSIBLE PAIN OF IT BEFORE BEING DRIVEN INSANE AS A FULLY AWARE YET DEAD CORPSE ROTTING IN THE COLD GROUND FOREVER.
...ER, BUT WHAT DO I KNOW FROM MAGES, EH WHAT?
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HM.
LENNY, RUN THAT DESCRIPTION OF THE BLACK MAGE BY ME ONE MORE TIME.
SURE, CARL. LET'S SEE. THE SUSPECT WAS REPORTED AS WEARING A DOPEY LOOKING POINTY HAT AND LIGHT BLUE ROBES THAT ARE SEVERAL SEASONS OUT OF STYLE. OH, AND HE HAS BEADY LITTLE EYES AND HE SMELLS. QUOTE 'REALLY WEIRD'
I DO NOT 'SMELL'! THOSE ARE MY SPELL COMPONENTS, YOU DOLTS! I REQUIRE THEM TO CONJUR UP THE INCREDIBLY EVIL POWERS AT MY COMMAND!
ER.
IS WHAT I WOULD BE SAYING IF I WERE THAT VILE, HANDSOME, AND CHARMING SERVANT OF THE DAMNED CURSE HIS BONES, I SAY! CURSE 'EM!
THEY'RE ON TO ME! THEY'RE ON TO ME! THEY'RE ON TO ME!
HE HAS A POINT, Y'KNOW HE PROBABLY WOULD SAY THAT IF HE REALLY WAS THE MAGE THAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR.
I GUESS WE'VE NO OTHER CHOICE THAN TO CHECK OUT THE STRIP CLUB DISTRICT
WAIT. WHY DO WE HAVE TO GO TO THE STRIP CLUB DISTRICT?
NO THEY DON'T
NO THEY--
TSK. EVERY-ONE KNOWS THAT ALL BLACK MAGES FREQUENT STRIP CLUBS.
YES THEY DO.
YES, THEY DO.
HELL YES WE DO!
OK. I HAVE TO REMAIN CALM AND RATIONAL OR ELSE THIS COULD GO VERY BADLY FOR ME.
SO WHAT I HAVE TO ASK MYSELF IS THIS: HOW WILL I DISPOSE OF THEIR BODIES..
AND WHERE CAN I FIND ENOUGH SOAP TO CLEAN UP THE HORRIBLE, HORRIBLE BLOODY MESS?
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ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE NOT THE BLACK MAGE WE'RE LOOKING FOR?
IS THIS THE FACE OF A LIAR?
IT'S KINDA HARD TO TELL, WHAT WITH THAT CHEESY DISGUISE AND ALL.
IT'S TIME TO END THIS.
WELL, LET'S DISCUSS IT IN THAT SECLUDED ALLEY.
I DON'T SEE WHY NOT
GOOD IT'D JUST TAKE LONGER IF YOU RESISTED. THIS IS FOR THE BEST
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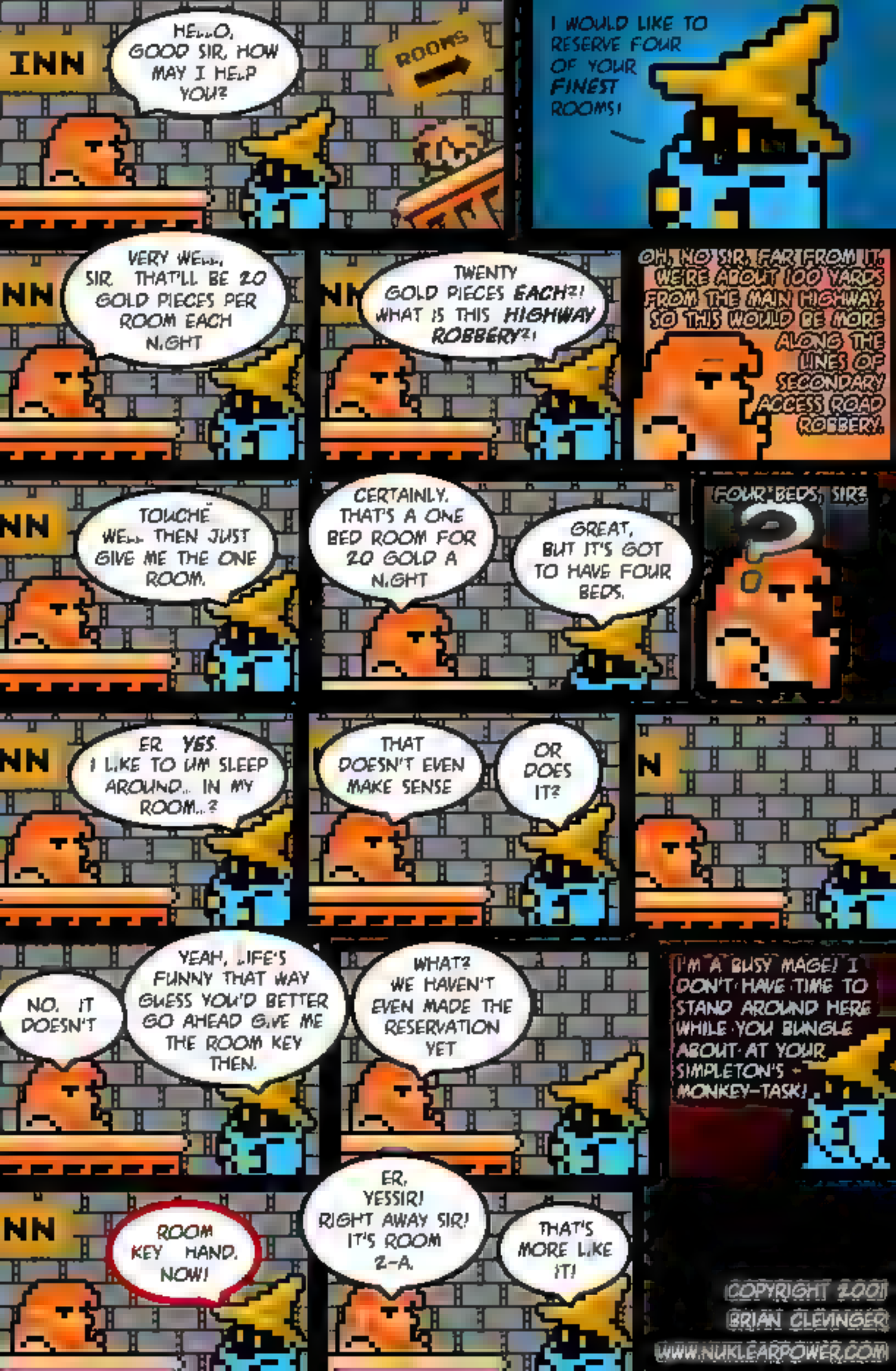
COPYRIGHT 2001 BRIAN CLEVINGER
THE PROBLEM WITH GUARDS IS THAT THEY ARE TOO INQUISITIVE FOR THEIR OWN GOOD
THAT AND THE CLEAN UP AFTERWARDS IS ALWAYS SUCH A BITCH
MAN, I HOPE I DON'T BUMP INTO THAT CRAZY MAGE AGAIN TODAY BUT CORNERIA'S A PRETTY BIG TOWN AND I'M NEARLY HOME SO I SHOULD BE FINE.
I WOULDN'T GO BACK THERE IF I WERE YOU, KID IT AIN'T PRETTY UNLESS YOU'RE PARTICULARLY MORBID... LIKE ME.
DON'T SAY I DIDN'T WARN YA, SPORT
HELP
THIS HAS NOT BEEN A GOOD DAY FOR ME.


INN
HE...O, GOOD SIR, HOW MAY I HELP YOU?
ROOMS
I WOULD LIKE TO RESERVE FOUR OF YOUR FINEST ROOMS!
VERY WE..., SIR. THAT'LL BE 20 GOLD PIECES PER ROOM EACH N.GHT
TWENTY GOLD PIECES EACH?! WHAT IS THIS HIGHWAY ROBBERY?!
OH, NO SIR, FAR FROM IT. WE'RE ABOUT 100 YARDS FROM THE MAIN HIGHWAY, SO THIS WOULD BE MORE ALONG THE LINES OF SECONDARY ACCESS ROAD ROBBERY.
TOUCHÉ. WE... THEN JUST GIVE ME THE ONE ROOM.
CERTAINLY. THAT'S A ONE BED ROOM FOR 20 GOLD A N.GHT
GREAT, BUT IT'S GOT TO HAVE FOUR BEDS.
FOUR BEDS, SIR?
ER YES. I LIKE TO UM SLEEP AROUND... IN MY ROOM...?
THAT DOESN'T EVEN MAKE SENSE
OR DOES IT?
NO. IT DOESN'T
YEAH, LIFE'S FUNNY THAT WAY GUESS YOU'D BETTER GO AHEAD GIVE ME THE ROOM KEY THEN.
WHAT? WE HAVEN'T EVEN MADE THE RESERVATION YET
I'M A BUSY MAGE! I DON'T HAVE TIME TO STAND AROUND HERE WHILE YOU BUNGLE ABOUT AT YOUR SIMPLETON'S MONKEY-TASK!
ROOM KEY HAND. NOW!
ER, YESSIR! RIGHT AWAY SIR! IT'S ROOM 2-A.
THAT'S MORE LIKE IT!
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YESSIR. I'LL JUST WAIT HERE WHILE THAT DESK-SLAVE GOES AND GETS ME THE ROOM KEY SO I CAN NAP.
ROOMS
THERE AIN'T NUTHIN' THAT BEATS A NICE RELAXING NAP AFTER BRUTALLY ASSUALTING A HELPLESS OLD MAN, EMOTIONALLY SCARRING AN INNOCENT CHILD TWICE, AND MURDERING A PAIR OF CITY GUARDS IN BROAD DAY LIGHT WHICH IS A BIT IRONIC REALLY
INN
ALL AND ALL, I'D HAVE TO SAY THAT THIS HAS BEEN THE PERFECT DAY YUP, NOTHING COULD RUIN MY MOOD
WELL, OTHER THAN THAT IMBICILE FIGHTER, OR THAT JERK RED MAGE, OR THAT CON ARTIST THIEF GEEZ, WHY'D I HAVE TO GET STUCK ON SOME BIG QUEST TO SAVE THE WORLD WITH THOSE MORONS WHEN ALL I WANTED WAS TO GET MY FREAK ON WITH THAT HOT WHITE MAGE CHICK?
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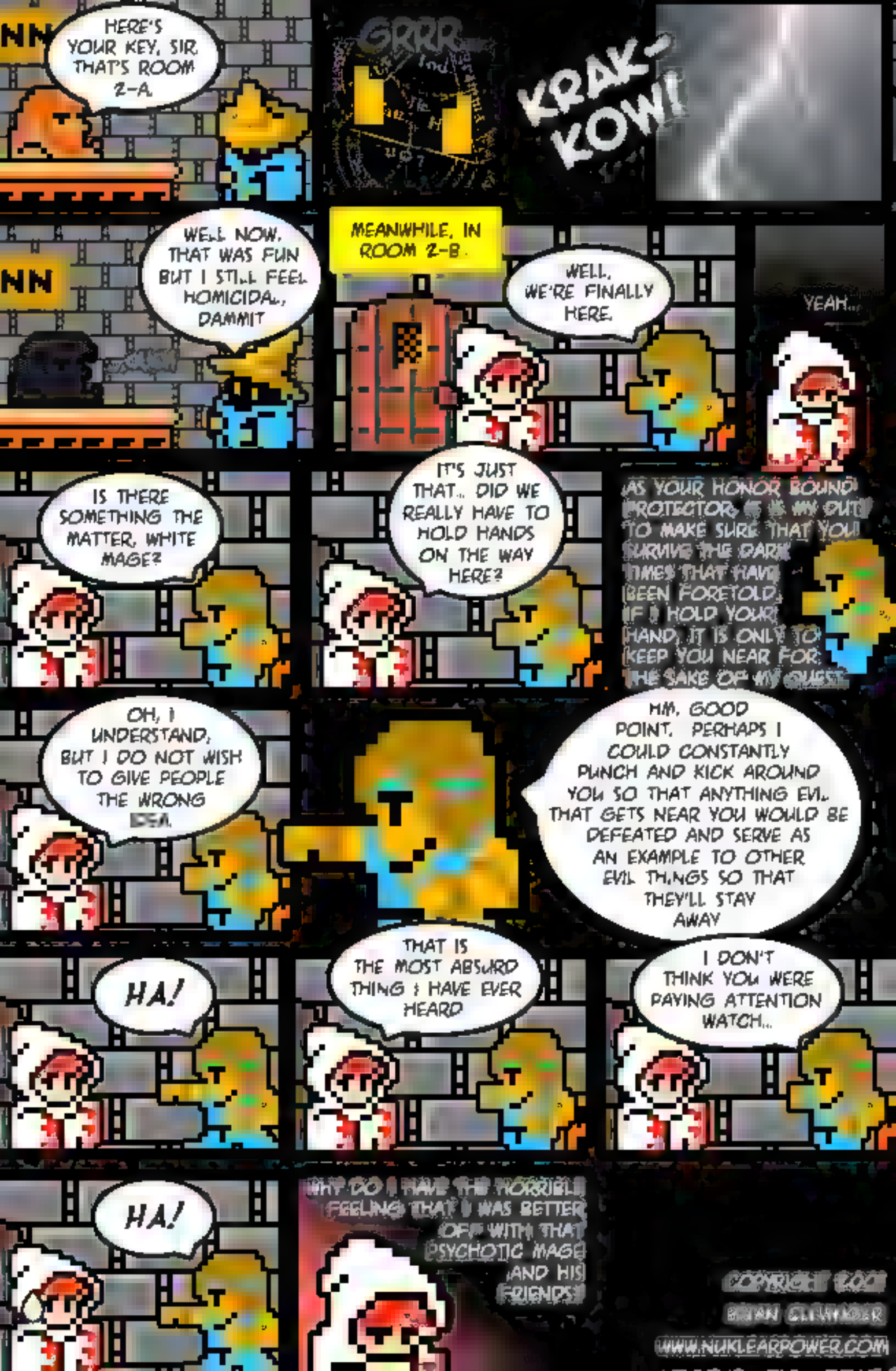
IT'S NOT FAIR, I TELL YA. IT'S JUST NOT..
FAIR.


HERE'S YOUR KEY, SIR. THAT'S ROOM 2-A.
GRRR
KRAK-KOW!
WELL NOW, THAT WAS FUN BUT I STILL FEEL HOMICIDAL, DAMMIT
MEANWHILE, IN ROOM 2-B.
WELL, WE'RE FINALLY HERE.
YEAH...
IS THERE SOMETHING THE MATTER, WHITE MAGE?
IT'S JUST THAT... DID WE REALLY HAVE TO HOLD HANDS ON THE WAY HERE?
AS YOUR HONOR BOUND PROTECTOR, IT IS MY DUTY TO MAKE SURE THAT YOU SURVIVE THE DARK TIMES THAT HAVE BEEN FORETOLD. IF I HOLD YOUR HAND, IT IS ONLY TO KEEP YOU NEAR FOR THE SAKE OF MY QUEST.
OH, I UNDERSTAND, BUT I DO NOT WISH TO GIVE PEOPLE THE WRONG IDEA.
HM. GOOD POINT. PERHAPS I COULD CONSTANTLY PUNCH AND KICK AROUND YOU SO THAT ANYTHING EVIL THAT GETS NEAR YOU WOULD BE DEFEATED AND SERVE AS AN EXAMPLE TO OTHER EVIL THINGS SO THAT THEY'LL STAY AWAY
HA!
THAT IS THE MOST ABSURD THING I HAVE EVER HEARD
I DON'T THINK YOU WERE PAYING ATTENTION WATCH...
HA!
WHY DO I HAVE THE HORRIBLE FEELING THAT I WAS BETTER OFF WITH THAT PSYCHOTIC MAGE AND HIS FRIENDS?
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LATER THAT DAY IN ROOM 2-A.
WE'RE BACK!
HEY GUYS. WHERE ARE ALL OF THE WEAPONS YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BUY?
WE'D BE BETTER OFF USING HARSH LANGUAGE THAN THE PATHETIC WOODEN PIECES OF... PATHETIC... WEAPONS THAT THESE PEOPLE CA..... WEAPONS.
UM...
BY MORDEKAINEN'S +5/+5 WAND OF SORCERERY, HE'S LOWERED MY INT SCORE JUST BY BEING NEAR ME!
SHUT UP. I'VE BEEN HANGING OUT WITH FIGHTER ALL DAY
YO.
I COULD LITERALLY FEEL HIM SUCKING AWAY AT MY... BRAIN-THINKY SCORE THING.
YOU MEAN INTELLIGENCE?
INTELLIGENCE IS HOW I THOUGHT UP SWORD-CHUCKS.
QUICK, ASK ME ABOUT SOME INSIPID LITTLE RULE YOU'D NEVER BOTHER TO ENFORCE!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT
DAMN YOUR MERELY CASUAL ATTENTION TO THE PHYSICS THAT GOVERN OUR FICKLE-FATED WORLD!
HOW MANY SWORDS COULD A SWORD-CHUCK CHUCK IF A SWORD-CHUCK COULD CHUCK SWORDS? I MADE THAT UP ALL BY MYSELF.
HE TALKED ABOUT SWORDS THE WHOLE TIME, DIDN'T HE? IT'S CLEARLY DRIVEN YOU INSANE
DAH! I CAN'T EVEN THINK OF AN EXAMPLE! CAN'T YOU SEE I'VE LOST MY ENCYCLOPEDIC KNOWLEDGE OF EVERY HANDBOOK AND PLAYER'S GUIDE KNOWN TO MAN!
NO NO NO, LISTEN I'LL GIVE YOU AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT
ER... UH...
SO WHAT? IT WAS A REALLY ANNOYING SKILL ANYWAY
BUT IT'S ALL I'VE GOT.
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WWW.NEWLEAFCOMICS.COM

HEY, THIEF DID THE DESK CLERK GIVE YOU ANY TROUBLE? HE WAS BEING PISSY ABOUT THE FOUR BEDS THING.. AND THAT LIGHTNING BOLT TO THE TEMPLE
DESK CLERK?
YEAH, THE DUDE AT THE FRONT DESK IN THE LOBBY WHEN YOU FIRST CAME INTO THE BUILDING.
HMMM...
INN
HEY LOOK OVER THERE
INN
RIGHTO.
INN
STEA-
OH YEAH, THAT GUY. WHAT ABOUT HIM?
WELL, DIDN'T HE BUG YOU ABOUT ASKING FOR THE ROOM KEY?
WHAT KEY?
... TO THIS ROOM.
[BUT THAT DEFEATS THE WHOLE PURPOSE OF ME SNEAKING INTO THESE ROOMS AND STEALING EVERYTHING THAT'S NOT BOLTED DOWN AND ON FIRE...
SO WHAT'RE YOU GUYS DOING HERE? OR DID RED MAGE PICK THE LOCK BY APPLYING A DIFFICULTY MODIFIER TO HIS SWORD PLAY AND BASIC MECHANICS SKILLS TO SOMEHOW CREATE A PATCHWORK LOCK PICKING SKI...?
... BRILLIANT! WHY DIDN'T I THINK OF THAT?!
DID YOU KNOW THAT NEITHER MR PIBB NOR DR PEPPER USE THE LITTLE DOT THINGIES FOR THEIR ABBREVIATIONS?
AH YES. LISTENING TO YOU FOR A FEW HOURS, THAT'S WHY
THEY BOTH START WITH P TOO. YOU JUST KNOW THAT CAN'T BE A COINCIDENCE.
FIGHTER. SHUT UP OR I WI... STAB YOUR FACE OFF.
THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE...
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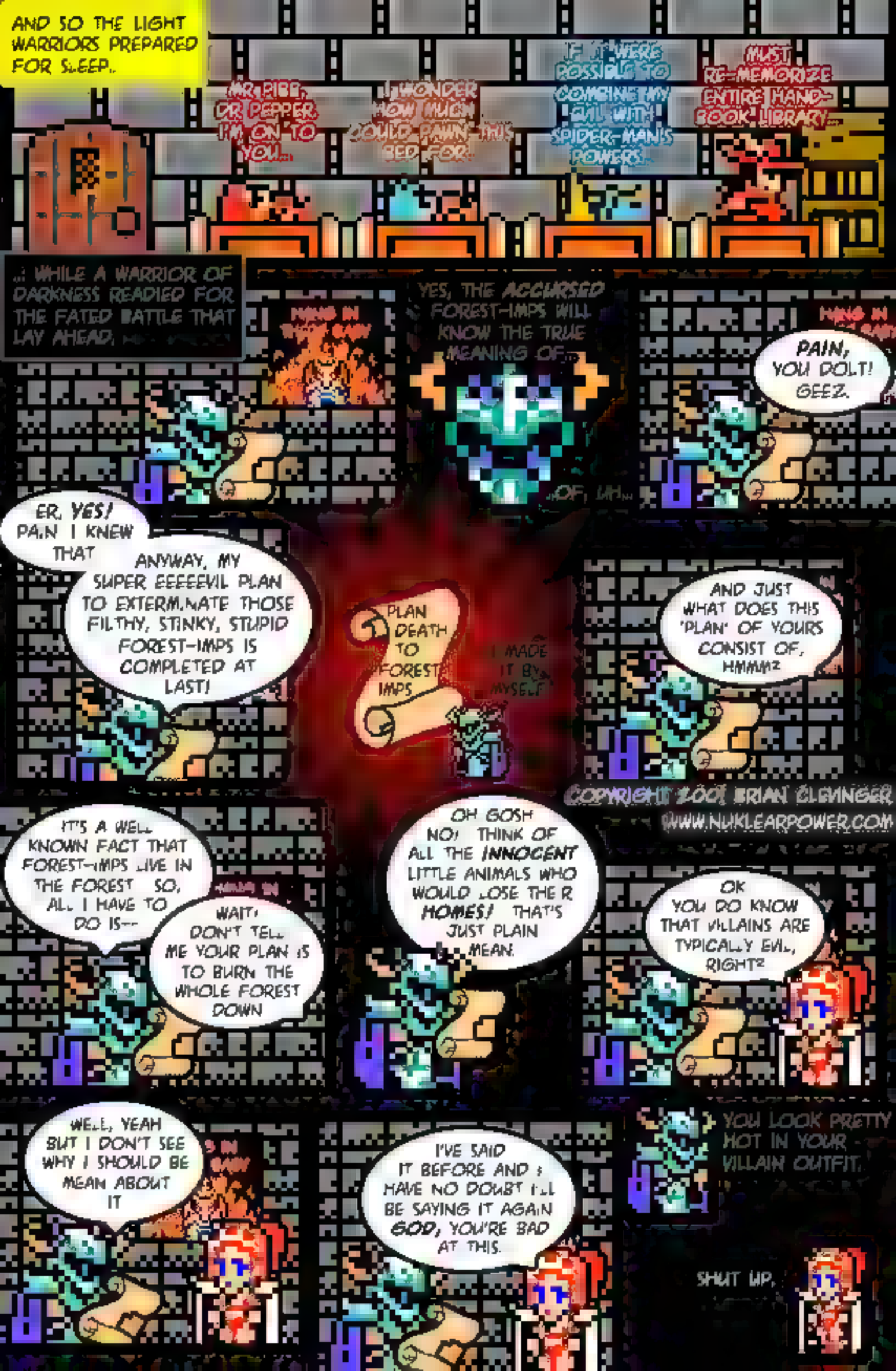
AND SO THE LIGHT WARRIORS PREPARED FOR SLEEP..
MR. PIBB, DR PEPPER I'M ON TO YOU...
I WONDER HOW MUCH COULD PAWN THIS BED FOR...
IF IT WERE POSSIBLE TO COMBINE MY EVIL WITH SPIDER-MAN'S POWERS...
MUST RE-MEMORIZE ENTIRE HAND-BOOK LIBRARY!...
.. WHILE A WARRIOR OF DARKNESS READIED FOR THE FATED BATTLE THAT LAY AHEAD,
YES, THE ACCURSED FOREST-IMPS WILL KNOW THE TRUE MEANING OF...
...OF, UH...
PAIN, YOU DOLT! GEEZ.
ER, YES! PAIN I KNEW THAT
ANYWAY, MY SUPER EEEEEVIL PLAN TO EXTERM.NATE THOSE FILTHY, STINKY, STUPID FOREST-IMPS IS COMPLETED AT LAST!
PLAN DEATH TO FOREST IMPS
I MADE IT BY MYSELF
AND JUST WHAT DOES THIS 'PLAN' OF YOURS CONSIST OF, HMMM?
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IT'S A WELL KNOWN FACT THAT FOREST-IMPS LIVE IN THE FOREST SO, ALL I HAVE TO DO IS--
WAIT! DON'T TELL ME YOUR PLAN IS TO BURN THE WHOLE FOREST DOWN
OH GOSH NO! THINK OF ALL THE INNOCENT LITTLE ANIMALS WHO WOULD LOSE THEIR HOMES! THAT'S JUST PLAIN MEAN.
OK YOU DO KNOW THAT VILLAINS ARE TYPICALLY EVIL, RIGHT?
WELL, YEAH BUT I DON'T SEE WHY I SHOULD BE MEAN ABOUT IT
I'VE SAID IT BEFORE AND I HAVE NO DOUBT I'LL BE SAYING IT AGAIN GOD, YOU'RE BAD AT THIS.
YOU LOOK PRETTY HOT IN YOUR VILLAIN OUTFIT.
SHUT UP.

WAIT A SECOND WHY ARE YOU EVEN WORRIED ABOUT THE FOREST-IMPS?
IT'S THE LIGHT WARRIORS THAT YOU NEED TO BE CONCERNED WITH.
YEAH BUT THOSE DANGED FOREST-IMPS ARE JUST SO FULL OF THEM-SELVES!
HELLO
SHUT UP
SO VERY PROUD OF THEIR CLEVER LITTLE GROUP TACTICS WHICH MAKE UP FOR THE FACT THAT INDIVIDUALLY THEY ARE AMONG THE WEAKEST OF CREATURES IN ALL THE WORLD
AND LOOKIT 'EM! JUST WALKIN' AROUND WITH THOSE DAMN DIRTY HANDS AND BEADY LITTLE EYES, AND THEIR WARPED SENSE OF MORALITY! BAH!
PLUS, I THINK ONE OF THOSE PUNKS BROKE MY FRONT WINDOW. BUT I CAN'T PROVE IT
OK. WE NEED TO WORK ON FOCUSING ON A GOAL. DO YOU FOLLOW?
OH YES, OF COURSE.. I THINK THAT GOALS ARE VERY IMPORTANT THAT'S WHY I CAME UP WITH THIS BRILLIANT PLAN TO DEFEAT THOSE IMPS!
IS HE EVEN LISTENING TO ME?
LOOK WE'VE GOT TO WORK ON YOUR PRIORITIES HERE.
HOW SO?
YOU FOOL YOU KIDNAPPED ME TO BE SACRIFICED TO YOUR LORD CHAOS. THE LIGHT WARRIORS ARE COMING HERE TO RESCUE ME. IF YOU DON'T STOP THEM, THEN YOU WILL FAIL.
BUT WHAT ABOUT THE FOREST-IMPS?
FORGET ABOUT THEM ALREADY!
WELL I'M NOT GOING TO PAY FOR THAT WINDOW
JUST SHUT UP PLEASE
SHE'S MEAN! BUT SHE STILL DOESN'T HAVE THAT VILLAIN ARMOR
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OK, SO THE FIRST STEP IS TO FORGET THIS STUPID PLAN ABOUT THE FOREST-IMPS.
BUT IT'S A REALLY GOOD PLAN.
YES, FINE. WHATEVER. WE'LL LOOK AT THAT PLAN AFTER WE TAKE CARE OF THE LIGHT WARRIORS.
BUT I STAYED UP ALL NIGHT LONG WORKING ON IT.
HELP OR NOT?! I'M NOT DRESSED IN THIS SKIMPY OUTFIT THAT SIMPLY SCREAMS SEXY AND EVIL FOR MY OWN AMUSEMENT. FINAL. IF YOU WANT TO EVIL, THEN YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO MAKE ME LIKE IT!
RIGHT, GOTCHA SO WHAT DO I DO FIRST?
WELL, YOU CAN START BY USING YOUR BAD GUY VOICE
IT SORT OF HURTS MY THROAT WHEN I DO THAT VOICE. OUCH.
YEAH! WHILE BACK AT THE INN
SQUEAK! CAN'T SLEEP, ENDLESS SQUEAKING.
THIS SUCKS. FIRST, THOSE MORONS VOTED WHITE MAGE OFF AND NOW SHE'S SHACKED UP WITH SOME GOOFY LOOKIN' BRUCE LEE RIP OFF. I THINK I'LL KILL THEM AS THEY SLEEP
OVER IN ROOM 2B
OH YEAH! RIGHT THERE, BABY. JUST LIKE THAT, YES!
EXCUSE ME, BLACK BELT?
HUFF, PUFF, YEAH? HUFF
DO YOU REALLY HAVE TO PRACTICE YOUR KUNG-FU JUMPS ON THE BED? I'M TRYING TO GET SOME REST
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THERE ARE PLACES OF POWER. PLACES OF DESTINY

HOLY PLACES WHERE LEY LINES CROSS AND THE SURROUNDING COUNTRYSIDE SURGES WITH MAGIKAL ENERGY

SOME SAY THAT THE FORCES OF FATE ARE DRAWN TO THESE PLACES. THAT EACH IS A NEXUS. A POINT WHERE THE TIDES OF HISTORY WILL BE TURNED WHERE THE WORLD WILL BE FOREVER CHANGED

A NEXUS IS BOTH BLESSING AND A CURSE

THEY ARE A POWERFUL RESOURCE TO WHOMEVER CLAIMS THEM. HE WHO POSSESSES A NEXUS, IT IS SAID, HOLDS THE POWER TO SHAPE THE *WORLD*

BUT THEY ARE SO HOTLY CONTESTED AMONG MAGES AND KINGS THAT MERELY DEFENDING A NEXUS CAN BE THE DISMANTLING OF AN ENTIRE NATION.

LEY LINES ARE ETERNAL BUT THEY ARE NOT UNCHANGING INDEED, IT IS THEIR VERY NATURE TO BE IN A CONSTANT STATE OF FLUX, TO BE EVER-CHANGING.

THIS IS LIFE THIS IS MAGIK NOT THE MERE PARLOR TRICKS OF CIRCLE-SORCERY

MAGICK IS THE INCARNATION OF WILL AND ITS EXPRESSION UPON THE FACE OF REALITY NOT A SAD SCRAWL UPON SOME ANCIENT PARCHMENT

AS SUCH ONE CAN NEVER PREDICT WHEN A NEXUS MAY FADE AWAY OR WHERE A NEW ONE MAY BE BORN

BUT WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF A NEXUS WAS NOT BORN AS A PLACE..

BUT AS A MAN?

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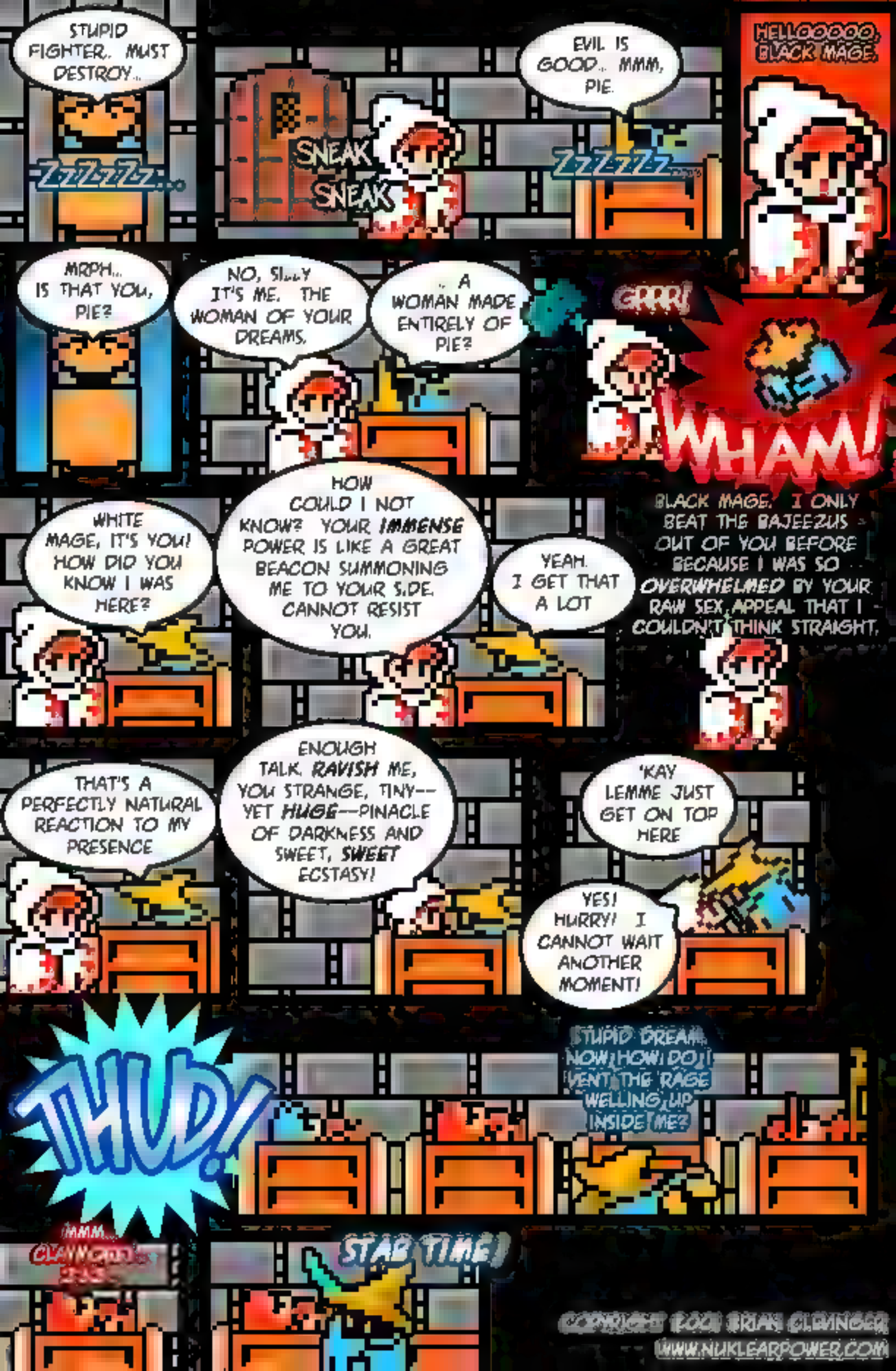
STUPID FIGHTER. MUST DESTROY..
ZZZZZZ...
SNEAK SNEAK
EVIL IS GOOD.. MMM, PIE.
ZZZZZZ...
HELLOOOOO, BLACK MAGE.
MRPH... IS THAT YOU, PIE?
NO, SILLY IT'S ME. THE WOMAN OF YOUR DREAMS.
.. A WOMAN MADE ENTIRELY OF PIE?
GRRR!
WHAM!
BLACK MAGE. I ONLY BEAT THE BAJEEZUS OUT OF YOU BEFORE BECAUSE I WAS SO .. OVERWHELMED BY YOUR RAW SEX APPEAL THAT I COULDN'T THINK STRAIGHT.
WHITE MAGE, IT'S YOU! HOW DID YOU KNOW I WAS HERE?
HOW COULD I NOT KNOW? YOUR IMMENSE POWER IS LIKE A GREAT BEACON SUMMONING ME TO YOUR SIDE. CANNOT RESIST YOU.
YEAH. I GET THAT A LOT
THAT'S A PERFECTLY NATURAL REACTION TO MY PRESENCE
ENOUGH TALK. RAVISH ME, YOU STRANGE, TINY-- YET HUGE--PINACLE OF DARKNESS AND SWEET, SWEET ECSTASY!
'KAY LEMME JUST GET ON TOP HERE
YES! HURRY! I CANNOT WAIT ANOTHER MOMENT!
THUD!
STUPID DREAM. NOW HOW DO I VENT THE RAGE WELLING UP INSIDE ME?
MMM... CLAYMORE...
STAB TIME!
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AWWW NUTS ANOTHER BLACK FORMLESS VOID OF THE SUBCONSCIOUS OH WE... BRING ON THE HOT SWORD-GIRLS YO
GREETINGS, FIGHTER
THIS IS NOT WHAT I MEANT WHEN I SAID 'SWORD-GIRL'
WHAT THE... NO, I'M NOT A SWORD-GIRL, I'M JUST A SWORD. MY NAME IS DR SWORDOPOLIS
LOOK DREAM-WORLD EITHER GIVE ME FULL ON SWORD-GIRLS OR DON'T WHY BOTHER HALF-ASSING IT, HM?
YOU'RE NOT LISTENING
AT LEAST YOU COULD'VE GIVEN ME THE GIRL HALF INSTEAD
FIGHTER! PAY ATTENTION! THIS IS A VERY IMPORTANT MESSAGE ABOUT YOUR DESTINY!
OK RIGHT PAYING ATTENTION NOW
THE SWORD IT IS AS MUCH AN INSTRUMENT OF PEACE
AS IT IS AN INSTRUMENT OF WAR. THROUGHOUT THE AGES, THE SWORD HAS BEEN--
COULD YOU SORTA FAST FORWARD TO THE POINT? I HAVE WHAT DOCTORS CALL A SHORT ATTENTION SP--OOH. SOMETHING SHINY!
AHEM!
SORRY.
OK, LET'S SEE. YADDA YADDA, DESTINY, BLAH BLAH, IMPORTANCE OF SWORDS AS SYMBOLS OF POWER THROUGHOUT HISTORY..
DUM DE DUM.
HERE WE GO READY?
SURE, WHY NOT?
DO YOU CHOOSE THE SWORD, OR DID THE SWORD CHOOSE YOU?
PFFFT! THAT'S EASY I CHOSE THE SWORD THEY'RE SHINY
WHAT.. NO. YOU'RE NOT LISTENING AGAIN. YOU SEE, THE POINT OF THE QUESTION IS NOT THE QUESTION ITSELF, BUT RATHER TO QUESTION WHETHER OR NOT YOU HAD ANY CHOICE IN THE MATTER OF BECOMING A SWORDSMAN IN THE FIRST PLACE
OF COURSE I DID I WAS A "HEY SWORDS ARE COOL" SO I ATTENDED FIGHTER'S CAMP BACK IN 86 AND THAT ENORMOUS DUDE WAS ALL LIKE--
THAT'S IT!
I'VE HAD ENOUGH I RELAYED THE MESSAGE, MY JOB HERE IS DONE. SO JUST WAKE UP AND GET STABBED BY BLACK MAGE
DR SWORDOPOLIS, DON'T LEAVE ME!
WHY AM I ALWAYS STUCK WITH THE IDIOTS? I'M THE VERY INCARNATION OF SWORD, I SHOULDN'T HAVE TO PUT UP WITH THINGS LIKE THIS...
POOF
ARGH! HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO STAB HIM TO DEATH WHEN I CAN'T GET THROUGH HIS DAMNED ARMOR?!
HEY WERE YOU TRYING TO STAB ME JUST NOW?
STUPID ARMOR. I'M GOIN' BACK TO SLEEP
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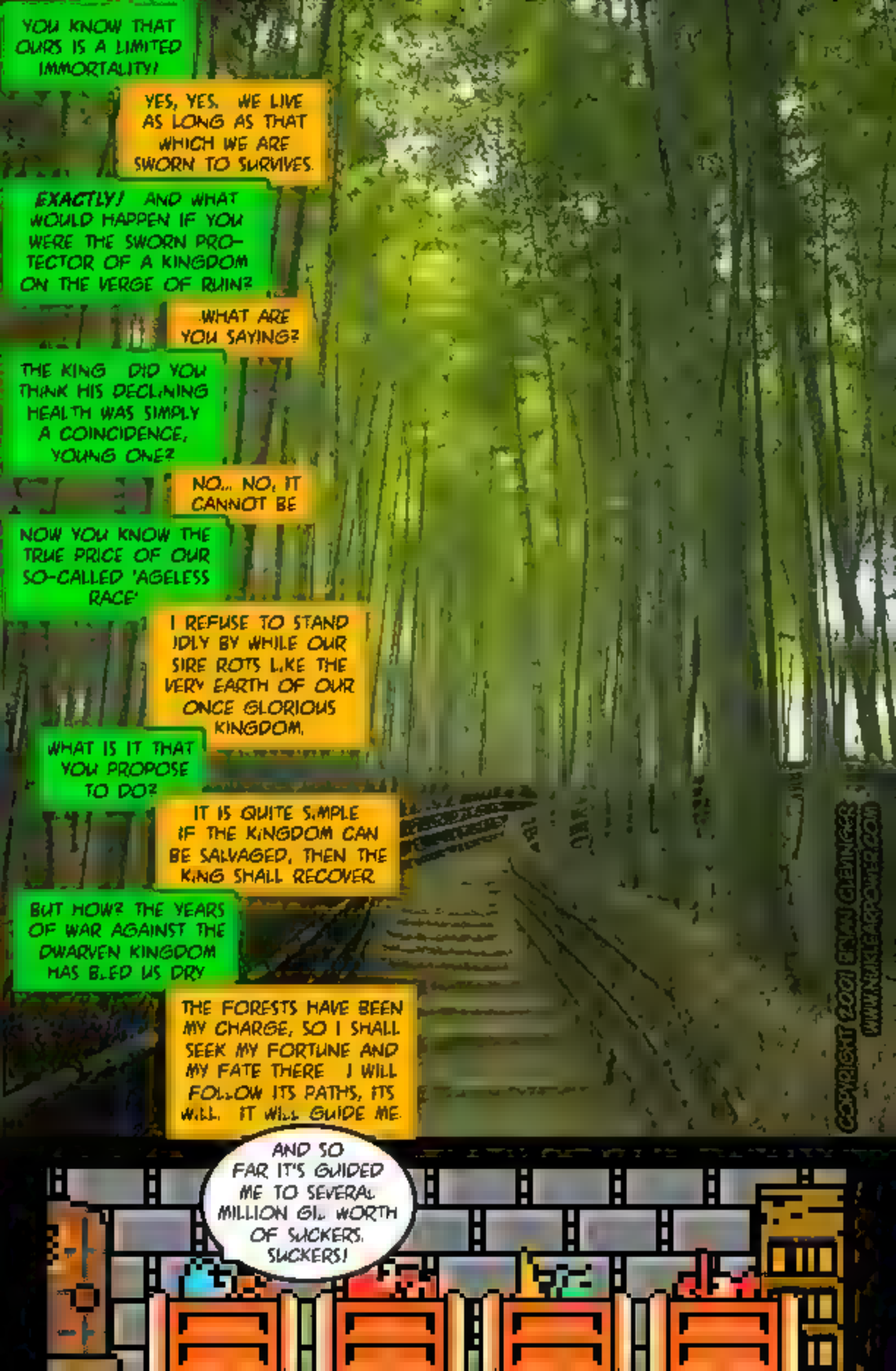
YOU KNOW THAT OURS IS A LIMITED IMMORTALITY!
YES, YES. WE LIVE AS LONG AS THAT WHICH WE ARE SWORN TO SURVIVES.
EXACTLY! AND WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF YOU WERE THE SWORN PROTECTOR OF A KINGDOM ON THE VERGE OF RUIN?
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?
THE KING DID YOU THINK HIS DECLINING HEALTH WAS SIMPLY A COINCIDENCE, YOUNG ONE?
NO... NO, IT CANNOT BE
NOW YOU KNOW THE TRUE PRICE OF OUR SO-CALLED 'AGELESS RACE'
I REFUSE TO STAND IDLY BY WHILE OUR SIRE ROTS LIKE THE VERY EARTH OF OUR ONCE GLORIOUS KINGDOM.
WHAT IS IT THAT YOU PROPOSE TO DO?
IT IS QUITE SIMPLE IF THE KINGDOM CAN BE SALVAGED, THEN THE KING SHALL RECOVER
BUT HOW? THE YEARS OF WAR AGAINST THE DWARVEN KINGDOM HAS BLED US DRY
THE FORESTS HAVE BEEN MY CHARGE, SO I SHALL SEEK MY FORTUNE AND MY FATE THERE. I WILL FOLLOW ITS PATHS, ITS WILL. IT WILL GUIDE ME.
AND SO FAR IT'S GUIDED ME TO SEVERAL MILLION GIL WORTH OF SUCKERS. SUCKERS!
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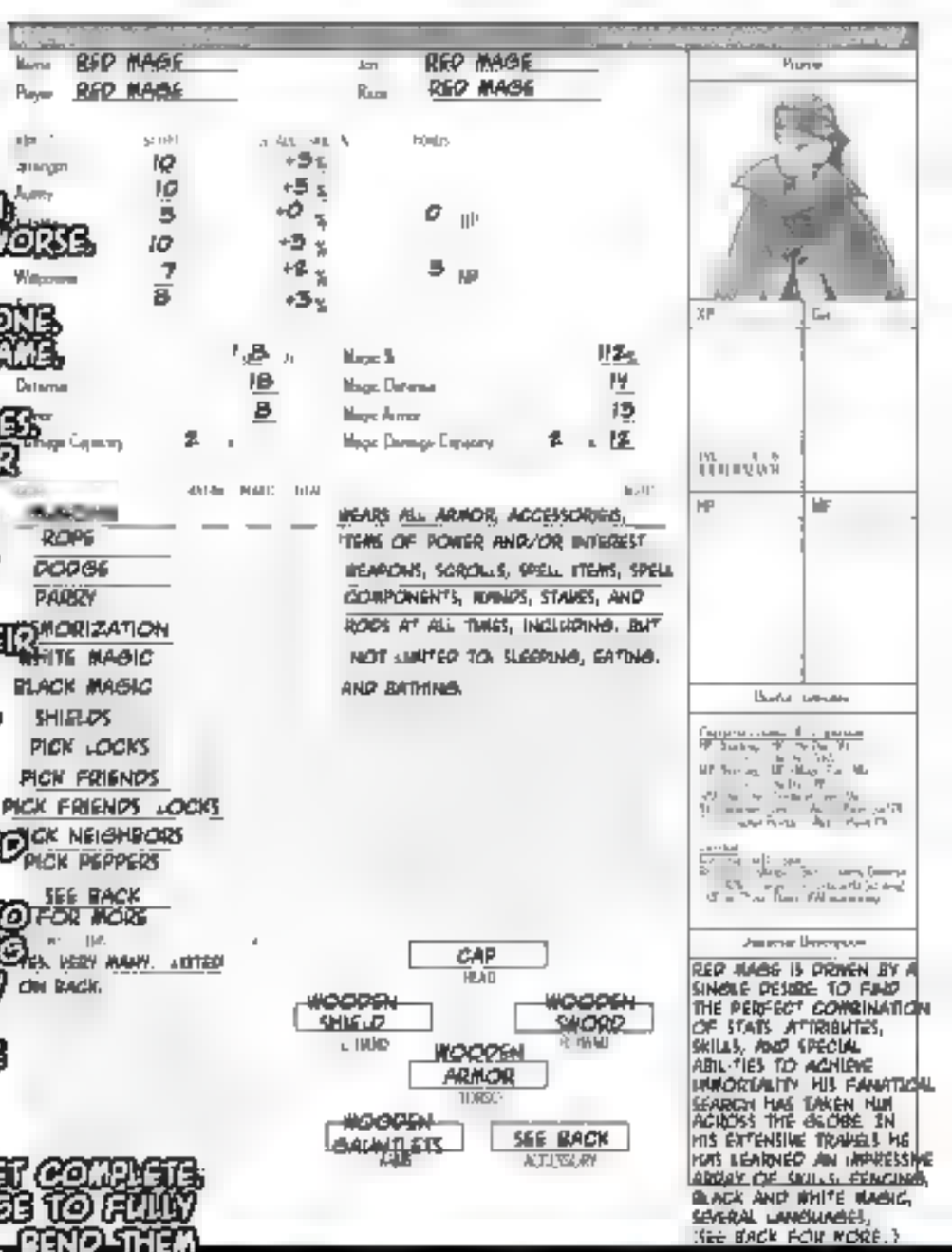
THERE ARE GODS, LITTLE ONE. SOME ARE WORSHIPPED. SOME ARE FEARED. SOME ARE WORSHIPPED OUT OF FEAR. OTHERS HAVE BEEN FORGOTTEN, SEALED AWAY FOR BETTER OR WORSE.

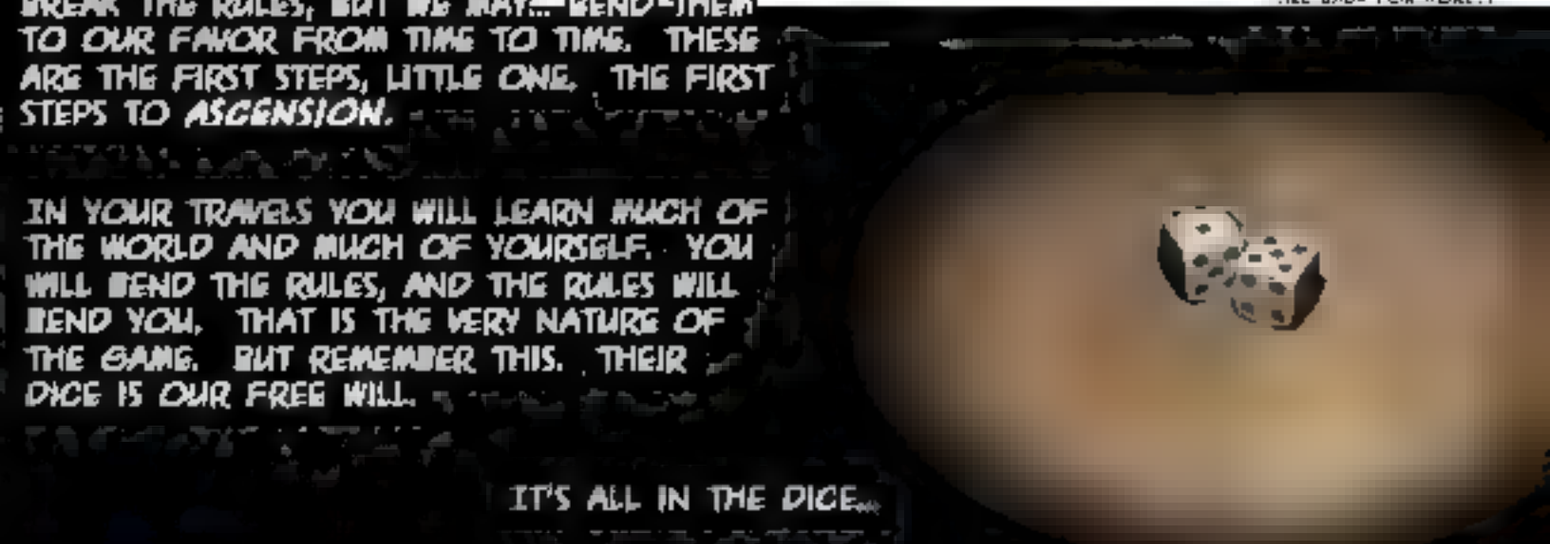
BUT MAKE NO MISTAKE, LITTLE ONE. TO THE GODS, THIS IS ALL A GAME. A SIMPLE ROLL OF THE DICE. BUT ALL GAMES MUST OBEY RULES. AND THAT IS WHERE OUR ORDER COMES INTO PLAY.

MANY ARE CONTENT TO MERELY LIVE BY THE RULES. TO GO - THROUGH THE ENTIRETY OF THEIR LIVES WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING THEM. NOT THOSE SUCH AS WE. WE HAVE BEGUN TO UNCOVER THE SYSTEMS, THE MACHINERY THAT WORKS OUR WORLD. FOR CENTURIES WE HAVE CATALOGUED AND RESEARCHED AND CROSS-INDEXED THE RULES IN ORDER TO SEEK A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF THEM SO THAT WE TOO MAY BECOME AS GODS. SO THAT WE MAY TRANSCEND FROM MERE PLAYTHINGS INTO THE PLAYERS.

OUR UNDERSTANDING IS NOT YET COMPLETE. WE HAVEN'T ENOUGH KNOWLEDGE TO FULLY BREAK THE RULES, BUT WE MAY... BEND THEM TO OUR FAVOR FROM TIME TO TIME. THESE ARE THE FIRST STEPS, LITTLE ONE. THE FIRST STEPS TO *ASCENSION*.

IN YOUR TRAVELS YOU WILL LEARN MUCH OF THE WORLD AND MUCH OF YOURSELF. YOU WILL BEND THE RULES, AND THE RULES WILL BEND YOU. THAT IS THE VERY NATURE OF THE GAME. BUT REMEMBER THIS. THEIR DICE IS OUR FREE WILL.





THE FOREST IMPS!
NOOOOOOO!
THE HORROR!
EVIL PRINCESS SARA? I HAD THE FOREST IMP DREAM AGA.N.
I'M SCARED.
IN THAT CASE.. GO THE HELL AWAY
AND SO GARLAND DID REST
OR DID HE
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AND SO, AFTER A NIGHT OF REALLY WEIRD DREAMS THAT PROBABLY HAVE ABSOLUTELY *NOTHING* TO DO WITH THE COURSE OUR HEROES WILL TAKE IN THE EXPANSIVE ADVENTURES AND JOURNEYS THAT LIE AHEAD, HA! THEY FINALLY GOT THEIR LAZY ASSES OUTTA BED AND BEGAN *THE QUEST.*

AH, THERE'S NOTHING QUITE THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ADVENTURE TO GET THE OL' BLOOD PUMPIN'.

ORDINARILY, I WOULD AGREE. AFTER ALL, IT IS A WELL KNOWN FACT THAT THE SINGLE GREATEST SOURCE OF XP AND HANDY MAGIC ITEMS IS ADVENTURING BUT IN THIS CASE...

WHAT IS IT? DO YOU THINK WE'RE DOOMED BECAUSE WE'RE STUCK WITH FIGHTER BECAUSE YOU GUYS ARE ALL *FUCKIN'* MORONS AND YOU DIDN'T VOTE HIM OFF THE TEAM IN FAVOR OF WHITE MAGE?

HUFF HUFF

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ER, WELL ACTUALLY I WAS GOING TO SAY I'D FEEL MORE CONFIDENT IF WE WERE STARTING OFF WITH BETTER EQUIPMENT. SAY, AT LEAST A +1/+1 WEAPON FOR EACH OF US.

OH, YEAH, THERE'S THAT TOO I GUESS. ANYWAY, LET'S JUST GET THIS DAMN QUEST THING OVER WITH.

SOME-TIMES I GET THE IMPRESSION THAT BLACK MAGE DOESN'T LIKE US... NAAAAH.

MEANWHILE, ELSEWHERE IN CORNERIA...

WANTED:
4 Ye Olde Lighte Warriors
Ofe Destinye Toe Rescuee
Kingdome Frome Darknesse.
Inquiree Withine.

FINALLY, AFTER ALL OUR TRAVELS, WE, THE TRUE WARRIORS OF LIGHT, HAVE FOUND OUR MOST SACRED QUEST.

Kingdome Frome Darkr
Inquiree Withine

WALK WALK

WORK WORK PASTE CONCEAL WORK

WANTED

Position filled.

Thank you,
The Management

'LET'S LEVEL UP FIRST' YOU SAID. 'IT'LL ONLY TAKE A MINUTE' YOU SAID.

SO...

WALK WALK WALK WALK

WALK WALK WALK WALK

ANYONE ELSE HERE LIKE SWORDS?

YOU ALREADY ASKED THAT

WALK WALK WALK WALK

DID I?

YES!

SO... ANYONE HERE LIKE CLAYMORES THEN?

YOU DID THAT TOO.

WALK WALK WALK WALK

WHEN?

BEFORE THE FLAMBERGES, CUTLASSES, RAPIERS, GLADIUSES, AND KATANAS BUT AFTER THE BASTARD SWORD, LONGSWORD, FALCHION, AND SCIMITAR.

I'M JUST TRYING TO MAKE CONVERSATION, Y'KNOW. I FIGURE WE'RE GOING TO BE ON THE DESTINED QUEST THING FOR A WHILE, SO WE OUGHTA GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER.

WHAT? DESTINED QUEST? SOME DUDE NAMED GARLAND KIDNAPPED THE PRINCESS. SHE GETS KIDNAPPED LIKE EVERY OTHER FROGGIN' WEEK!

TECHNICALLY, ACCORDING TO THE CONTRACT HERE, OUR 'TEAM' WON'T BE DISSOLVED UNTIL I

I HELPED WITH THAT PART.

AND IT LOOKS LIKE YOU SUCKERS WILL BE VERY PROFITABLE FOR ME FOR A LONG TIME TO COME

VERY PROFITABLE?

WHY AM I NOT SURPRISED BY THAT?

IF YOU'VE GOT SO MUCH MONEY, THEN WHY ARE WE TROMPING THROUGH THE HIGHLY DANGEROUS OVER WORLD EQUIPPED WITH NOTHING BUT OUR WITS?

HA! WHO NEEDS WITS WHEN YOU'VE GOT SWORDS!

WHAT?

WHAAA

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WE JOIN OUR HEROES IN THE MIDST OF BATTLE..
AREN'T WE A BIT EARLY IN THE QUEST FOR FULL ON WEREWOLF ACTION?
NO TIME FOR
BZZZZZZZRR!
BACKSTAB!.... X2 DAMAGE!
SURPRISE ATTACK!..... X2 DAMAGE!
CRITICAL!..... X2 DAMAGE!
HEH. THE SUCKERS NEVER SAW IT COMIN'.
GRRR
I THINK WE'VE ONLY SUCCEEDED IN MAKING THEM ANGRIER...
OH YEAH? WELL THEN PREPARE FOR A STEAMING HOT PILE OF ACTION!
TIGER'S FANG STRIKE!
STEAMING PILE!
STOP!
FIZZLE
ARE YOU CRAZY?!
OH YES, I'M CRAZY ALRIGHT...
CRAZY LIKE A FOX!
THAT'S IT STAND IN FRONT OF ME, SIR CAP OF PLUMED. I'M GONNA HADOKEN YOU AND THE DAMN WERE-WOLVES IN ONE GO.
DO AS YOU WISH, BUT KNOW THAT WITHOUT MY HELP, YOU'LL NEVER GET OUT OF THIS ENCOUNTER... ALIVE
STILL... QUITE TEMPTED TO KILL... RED MAGE...
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YOU BETTER KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING, RED MAGE
I MAKE IT MY BUSINESS TO KNOW WHAT I'M DOING!
THAT DOESN'T EVEN MAKE SENSE.
HOW CAN I TELL THEM I FAILED MY INT CHECK TO MAKE UP A WITTY RETORT!
ANSWER: DO, NOT!
THE POINT IS WE CANNOT DEFEAT THESE WEREWOLVES WITH STANDARD TACTICS.
STANDARD WHAT?
PUT THE POINTY END INTO THE SQUISHY THINGS THAT SCREAM AND BLEED.
OHHHHH! WHY DIDN'T Y'SAY SO?
THESE ARE WEREWOLVES, YOU SEE. THEY CAN HEAL FROM ANY INJURY, SAVE THOSE WHICH CAUSE THEM AGGRAVATED DAMAGE!
ISN'T ALL DAMAGE AGGRAVATING? I KNOW IT ANNOYS ME WHEN I GET HIT
OH MAN, AND THOSE POTIONS. THE AFTERTASTE IS WORSE THAN COKE! AND YOU CAN'T TELL ME IT'S HEALTHY TO KNOCK BACK LIKE TEN OF THOSE THINGS EVERY DAY. I SWEAR, HAVING TO DRINK THOSE IS AT LEAST AS AGGRAVATING AS TAKING THE DAMAGE ITSELF!
LISTEN! WEREWOLVES TAKE AGGRAVATED DAMAGE FROM SILVER WEAPONS. IT IS THEIR ONE WEAKNESS.
THEREFORE, SINCE I UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE THE BEST DODGE POOL, I'LL RUN AMONGST THEM AND YOU GUYS ASSAIL THEM WITH YOUR SILVER WEAPONRY—WHICH I'LL ASSUME YOU ALL BROUGHT, LIKE ME, JUST IN CASE OF SUCH A SUPERNATURAL EMERGENCY—WHILE THEY'RE DISTRACTED!
SIDESTEP SPECIALTY, DON'T FAIL ME NOW!
YAAAR!!!
ARRRRRRGH!
OH, SWEET JESUS! IT HURTS!
DODGE POOL?
IS THAT LIKE A WATER BASED VERSION OF DODGE BALL?
WOW RED MAGE HAS A LOT OF BLOOD..
THEIR CLAWS ARE RAKING THROUGH MY FLESH LIKE A +2/+2 SWORD OF WOUNDING! ARRRRRGH!
BUT NOT AS MUCH BLOOD AS HE HAD ABOUT FIVE MINUTES AGO, OF COURSE.
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HOW LONG IS THIS GOING TO TAKE?
WHAM!
I DON'T THINK YOUR PLAN WORKED
I BLAME MYSELF MOSTLY.
I SHOULD'VE DOUBLE CHECKED EVERYONE'S INITIATIVE ROLLS TO MAKE SURE THAT THE NPCS WENT AFTER ALL OF US.
I SHOULD THINK THAT THE WEREWOLVES ARE QUITE EXHAUSTED AFTER BEATING THE HELL OUT OF RED MAGE FOR SO LONG.
YEAH, REALLY IT'S ALMOST AS IF THEY WENT OUT OF THEIR WAY TO ATTACK RED MAGE IN THE MOST TIME CONSUMING, EXCRUCIATING WAY IMAGINABLE.
HEY!... MAYBE NOW THEY'RE SO WINDED FROM THEIR BRUTAL AND RELENTLESS ATTACKS, THAT WE CAN STRIKE THEM DOWN!
ACTUALLY... THEY HAVEN'T EVEN BEGUN TO FIGHT. THEY CAN STILL TRANSFORM INTO THEIR NIGH-INVINCIBLE WOLF-MAN OR "CRINOS" FORM.
CRINOS?
DON'T YOU MEAN KINKOS? WHAT'RE THEY GONNA DO, COLOR COPY US TO DEATH?
THAT WAS — PRETTY LAME.
I COULD'VE DONE BETTER. I WOULD'VE SAID SOMETHING ABOUT SWORDS. I LIKE THEM, Y'KNOW.
LOOK, THEY CAN'T ALL BE THE THEORY OF RELATIVITY, OKAY?
EXCUSE ME... COMRADE BLEEDING TO DEATH OVER HERE MAYBE YOU—
WAIT, WAIT I'VE GOT ONE "CRINOS? MO' LIKE BUST YOU IN THE NOSE!"
I REALLY... COULD USE.. A POTION..
HOW IS THAT NOT LAME?
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I'VE GOT IT 'CRINOS? MO' LIKE YOU GONNA CRY WHEN I SMACK YA UPS.DE DA NOSE!'
THAT'S JUST AWFUL.
AGONY UNBEARABLE. HEALING POTION... NEEDED TO. SUSTAIN MY LIFE...
HOLD ON, I'VE GOT ONE THAT PLAYS OFF THAT WHOLE CRY THING.
AHEM. DEVIL MAY CRY, BUT WEREWOLF GONNA DIE!
LIFE.. FLASHING BEFORE MY EYES..
OH, I LIKE THAT ONE.
HM, AS DO I. LYRICAL AND YET TOPICAL. LET'S USE THAT ONE.
ORGANS REARRANGED IN ALPHABETIC ORDER.
DUDE. YOU'RE A RED MAGE. YOU CAN USE WHITE MAGIC TO HEAL YOURSELF, SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM HERE?
GIVEN THAT I CAN ONLY CAST A CERTAIN NUMBER OF SPELLS PER DAY, IF I WERE TO CAST ONE NOW I WOULD THEN BECOME LESS VERSATILE.
IF YOU DON'T CAST ONE NOW, THEN YOU'LL BECOME LESS ALIVE.
UNLESS ONE OF MY INTREPID ADVENTURING COMPANIONS WERE TO HAND ME A HEALING POTION.
WELL YOU'RE ABOUT TO HAVE A NEGATIVE BLOOD FLOW PROBLEM!
THEY'RE GOOD...
NOT TO QUIBBLE, BUT SHOULDN'T IT BE A 'POSITIVE BLOOD FLOW' PROBLEM? YOU SEE THAT IMPLIES TOO MUCH OF THEIR BLOOD IS FLOWING, WHICH WOULD BE AN INCREASE ALONG THE POSITIVE AXIS.
YES BUT THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT USING THE WORD 'POSITIVE' IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE WORD 'PROBLEM.' THE TWO JUST DON'T GEL. IT SOUNDED LIKE I WAS CONTRADICTING MYSELF.
AND MIGHT I ADD THAT CONTRADICTING ME, IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE IS NOT THE MOST EFFECTIVE TACTIC...
THIS IS THE MOST PATHETIC BATTLE EVER. LET'S NEVER, NEVER, NEVER TALK ABOUT IT AGAIN.
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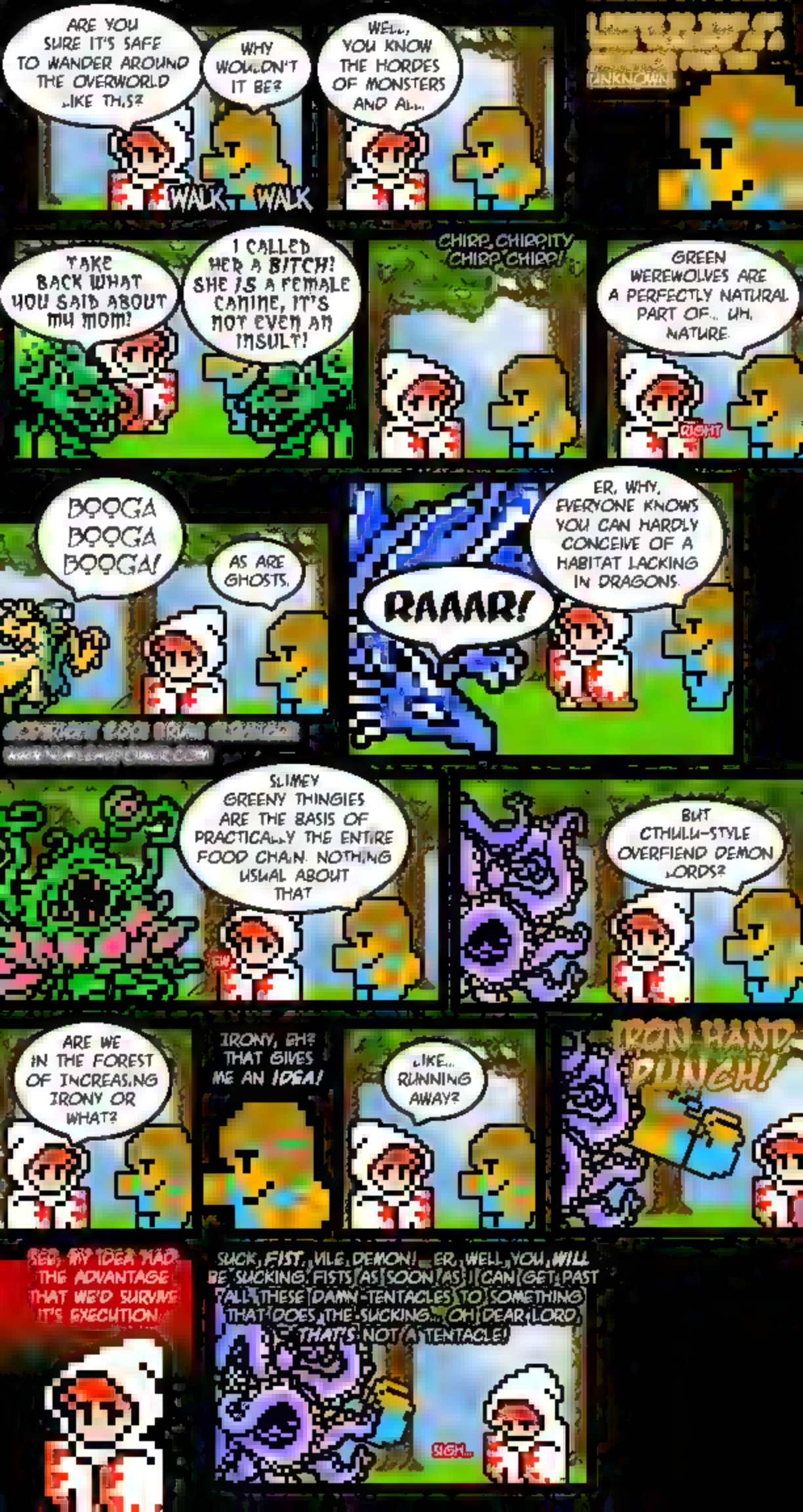
ARE YOU SURE IT'S SAFE TO WANDER AROUND THE OVERWORLD LIKE THIS?
WHY WOULDN'T IT BE?
WELL, YOU KNOW THE HORDES OF MONSTERS AND ALL...
WALK... WALK
UNKNOWN
TAKE BACK WHAT YOU SAID ABOUT MY MOM!
I CALLED HER A BITCH! SHE IS A FEMALE CANINE, IT'S NOT EVEN AN INSULT!
CHIRP CHIRPITY CHIRP CHIRP!
GREEN WEREWOLVES ARE A PERFECTLY NATURAL PART OF... UH, NATURE.
RIGHT
BOOGA BOOGA BOOGA!
AS ARE GHOSTS.
RAAAR!
ER, WHY, EVERYONE KNOWS YOU CAN HARDLY CONCEIVE OF A HABITAT LACKING IN DRAGONS.
SLIMEY GREENY THINGIES ARE THE BASIS OF PRACTICALLY THE ENTIRE FOOD CHAIN. NOTHING USUAL ABOUT THAT
BUT CTHULU-STYLE OVERFIEND DEMON LORDS?
ARE WE IN THE FOREST OF INCREASING IRONY OR WHAT?
IRONY, EH? THAT GIVES ME AN IDEA!
LIKE... RUNNING AWAY?
IRON HAND PUNCH!
SEE, MY IDEA HAD THE ADVANTAGE THAT WE'D SURVIVE IT'S EXECUTION.
SUCK, FIST, VILE, DEMON! ...ER, WELL, YOU WILL BE SUCKING FISTS AS SOON AS I CAN GET PAST ALL THESE DAMN TENTACLES TO SOMETHING THAT DOES THE SUCKING... OH DEAR LORD, THAT'S NOT A TENTACLE!
SIGH...

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Y'KNOW, THIS IS REALLY PATHETIC.
WHAT IS?
WE JUST STARTED OUR BIG IMPORTANT QUEST THING AND WE COULDN'T EVEN GET PAST THE FIRST ENCOUNTER!
WE DIDN'T LOSE.
TECHNICALLY
WE DIDN'T EXACTLY WIN EITHER CAPTAIN MORON OVER HERE NEARLY GOT SLAIN.
I'M NOT DEAD YET.
DON'T TEMPT ME.
WELL, IT WAS A GOOD EXPERIENCE FOR US AS A GROUP ANYWAY
ACTUALLY, SINCE WE DON'T GET EXPERIENCE UNLESS WE DEFEAT THE MONSTERS, IT WAS A COMPLETE WASTE OF OUR TIME.
WHAT'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
REGARDLESS OF WHETHER OR NOT THE MONSTERS WERE KILLED, WE HAD AN EXPERIENCE. YOU CAN'T DENY THAT
IT'S THE LAW OF OUR UNIVERSE AS CHRONICLED IN THE PLAYER'S HANDBOOK WHICH WAS FIRST SCRIBED BY—
ALL I KNOW IS THAT WE, AS TEMPORAL BEINGS, EXIST IN TIME.
OUR REALITY IS THE SPACE OF EXPERIENCE MEASURED IN TIME.
EXPERIENCE
TIME
SINCE THE ENCOUNTER DID NOT HAPPEN OUTSIDE OF TIME-- AS EVIDENCED BY THE FACT THAT WE WERE CAPABLE OF SENSING IT--IT WAS EXPERIENCED BY US.
I THINK WE'RE OPERATING UNDER DIFFERENT MEANINGS OF 'EXPERIENCE.'
I THINK I'M BORED OUT OF MY MIND.
I THINK YOU'D FIRST NEED A MIND TO BE BORED OUT OF
GOOD POINT.

I'M REALLY NOT GAY!
WELL, I HAVE TO ADMIT...
THOSE SHOES WERE STARTING TO MAKE ME WONDER
THIEF'S SHOES
WHAT'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
YOUR SHOES. THEY'RE A LITTLE.. THAT WAY
BLACK MAGE HAS A POINT IF I DIDN'T KNOW ANY BETTER, I'D SAY THEY WERE Y'KNOW
NO, I DON'T.
THEY LOOK LIKE ELF SHOES TO ME
I THINK WE ALL KNOW. I MEAN, — LOOKIT 'EM!
WELL, THAT'S NOT EXACTLY WHAT I MEANT, BUT THOSE TREE-HUGGIN' HIPPY BASTARDS ARE ABOUT 5 MINUTES FROM IT, I'LL TELL YA THAT
I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW--
I'M NOT GAY!
NO ONE SAID YOU WERE, FRUITY
SH!
OH NOW YOU'RE BEING CATTY
QUIET!
REEOWR, HISS!
I THINK I HEAR SOMEONE APPROACHING. TO THE TREES!
OOF!
LEAD!
AND ALSO A PUSH
YOU PUSHED RED MAGE.
THEY'LL BE UPON US ANY MOMENT, HURRY!
ONTO FIGHTER'S SWORD
WHICH IS WEIRD 'CAUSE IT STARTED OUT SHEATHED
I BOTCHED MY ATHLETICS ROLL. BIG TIME
I CAN PROVE IT TOO, I'LL KICK ALL THEIR ASSES. IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER
ER... NOT THAT I WANT TO TOUCH THEIR ASSES. JUST KICK 'EM.
WHY ME?
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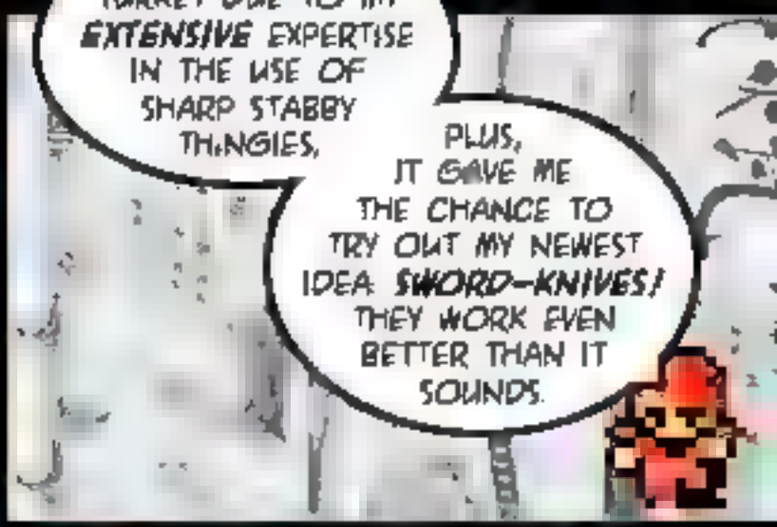
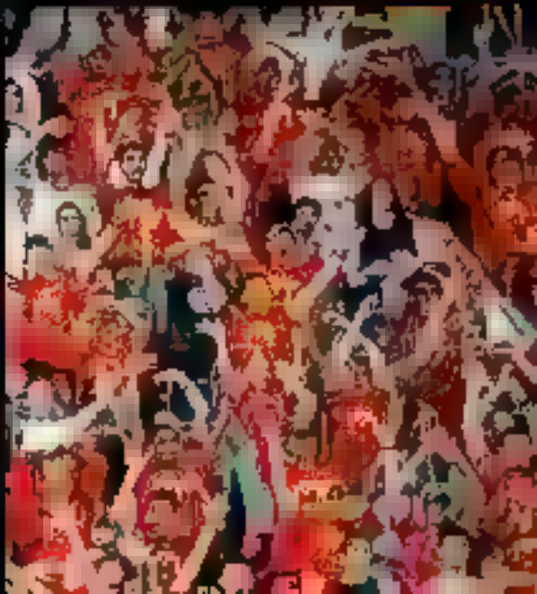
IN HONOR OF THE FESTIVAL OF DEVOURING, NUKLEARPOWER.COM PROUDLY PRESENTS AN 8-BIT ~~CHRISTMAS~~ THANKSGIVING





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OH MY WHAT HAPPENED TO RED MAGE?
A SLIGHT MISCALCULATION ON HIS PART
REALLY? 'CAUSE I THOUGHT HE TRIED TO ATTACK THOSE INVINCIBLE WEREWOLVES SINGLE-HANDEDLY IN SOME OVERLY-COMPLEX PLAN THAT SURELY WOULD'VE GUARANTEED OUR VICTORY HAD ANY OF US UNDERSTOOD WHAT HE WAS TALKING ABOUT
WELL YES. TO BE FAIR, HIS MISCALCULATION WAS TO TRUST IN US...
BUT THE WAY I SEE IT
MAYBE, BUT I BLAME RED MAGE ANYWAY
BASED ON WHAT?
SPITE MOSTLY.
PLUS I THINK HE'S A BIG IDIOT
...I SEE.
MUST REMEMBER WHITE MAGE'S OATH. MUST NOT BRING HARM TO OTHERS...
BE THAT AS IT MAY, WOULD YOU MIND STEPPING BACK SO I CAN HEAL HIM?
YYYYNNN. YYY N. I ER. THIS IS A TRICK QUESTION, ISN'T IT
WHY DON'T YOU JUST TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT ME TO ANSWER?
BETTER HURRY, WHITE MAGE. HE'S NOT GETTIN' ANY HEALTHIER. AIN'T THAT RIGHT?
I SAID AIN'T THAT RIGHT!
KYEK!
C'MON, ANSWER ALREADY! DON'T MAKE ME STAB YOU GOOD IN THE FACE!
POW!
WOW. THAT DOPEY LOOKIN' POINTY HAT SURE IS AERODYNAMIC! YOWZA.
AHEM
I'M DANC'N' LIKE A MONKEY!
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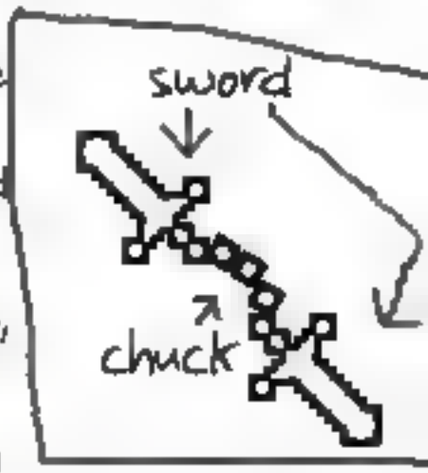
Fighter's Journal

(do not look, especially if you are Black Mage!)

Today is my first official day of being a LIGHT WARRIOR!!!! Right now we are just taking a little break while Red Mage gets healed up by White Mage. I think that Black Mage might need some healing too (why do I hang out with so many mages? Oh well, it is a mystery of the universe, but at least I gets MORE SWORDS!). But first we will have to find him because White Mage hits very hard. Red Mage said she must've rolled a 'natural twenty' I am not sure, but I think he must gamble a lot or something because he is always talking about dice. Maybe that is why he and Thief get along so well. Red Mage likes to gamble and Thief likes to take all of his shineys.

Anyway, the reason that we are resting is because we just had our very first RANDOM ENCOUNTER!!!! Well, we've had them before, but never as a group! I really feel like we're officially LIGHT WARRIORS now! There were these werewolves and they looked really mean and Thief stabbed 'em in their backs. Black Mage whispered something about how felt strange to see Thief stabbing someone else in the back besides us but I don't know what he meant by that. The werewolves didn't die though so Red Mage had a really good idea (I knew it was good because it involved me using my swords to kill evil monsters. That's the textbook definition of BRILLIENT!). But then something went wrong and Red Mage got hurt really bad. So then the werewolves went away because they were yelling at each other. I hope they are pals again because friends are good. I don't know how I could get around without a good friend like Black Mage. He's been my best friend since forever but he always says "Don't remind me" when I tell him that. He is so funny!!!



Since we are taking a break, I decided to make a sketch of my latest brilliant idea. SWORD-CHUCKS! As you can see, I have solved all the complex engineering problems (other than stabbing yourself to death and slicing off your own hands but I am sure I'll think of something). Oh, I think we found Black Mage so I will go now. BYE!!!!

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RED MAGE, WHY DON'T YOU JUST USE YOUR OWN HEALING MAGIC NEXT TIME? I WON'T ALWAYS BE AROUND TO SAVE YOU.
BUT I WANT TO STAY AT MY PEAK VERSATILITY LEVEL!
THINK OF IT LIKE THIS: WHICH IS MORE VERSATILE? A DEAD MAGE OR A LIVING MAGE MINUS ONE WHITE SPELL?
HMM...
I SEE. YOU'VE OPENED MY EYES, WHITE MAGE. THANK YOU.
WHAT'S THE MATTER, THIEF?
MY BAG FULL OF GOLD IS STUCK IN THIS BUSH. I CAN'T GET IT LOOSE
LET GO OF YOUR WORLDLY POSSESSIONS. THEY WILL ONLY SLOW YOU DOWN.
THAT'S THE CRAZIEST THING I EVER HEARD!
AND MIND YOU, I'VE [illegible] FIGHTER BEFORE, BUT THAT'S STILL CRAZIER!
THIEF..
I FEEL.. STRANGELY UNBURDENED. PROBABLY BECAUSE GOLD IS VERY HEAVY AND I HAD QUITE A LOT OF IT. Y'KNOW, FROM ALL THE STEALING. IT'S WHAT I DO, ME BEING A THIEF, AND ALL.
I'M JUST HAPPY TO HAVE HELPED YOU SEE THAT GREED IS NOT THE PATH TO PEACE.
OH YEAH, DEFINITELY
I WONDER IF I COULD CUT OFF THE BRANCH IT'S STUCK ON...
WHAT'CHA GOT THERE, FIGHTER?
IT'S THE WORKING DESIGN FOR MY NEW BRILLIANT INVENTION: SWORD-CHUCKS. BUT I'VE RUN INTO A LITTLE PROBLEM..
HM. I THINK I UNDERSTAND THE OVERALL PRINCIPLE OF YOUR DESIGN. PERHAPS A LONGER LENGTH OF CHAIN WOULD MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR ONE TO ACTUALLY WIELD THE WEAPON WITHOUT HAVING TO HIT ONE'S OWN LIMBS.
PERFECTION!
NO ONE THINKS YOU'RE GAY AND EVEN IF YOU WERE, IT WOULDN'T MATTER.
YOU'RE RIGHT, I HAVE NO REASON TO BE SO PARANOID ABOUT WHAT OTHERS MAY OR MAY NOT THINK BESIDES, LOVE IS LOVE. WE SHOULD LET IT FLOURISH WHEREVER WE CAN FIND IT
YO.
YOU ARE SIMPLY A HORRIBLE LITTLE MONSTER AND I PRAY FOR YOUR QUICK AND MERCIFUL DEATH.
FLIRT!
THIEF GO THE
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OKAY, LET'S GO TO GARLAND'S CASTLE ALREADY SO FIGHTER'LL SHUT UP ABOUT IT

YAAAAAAAAY

WILL YOU TWO BE JOINING US ON OUR QUEST?

OH, ER NO. WE HAVE TO UM...

?!?!?!

WHAT SORT OF SECRET CONFUSED YOU?

IF THEY DON'T FIGHT, THEN THAT MEANS MORE EXPERIENCE FOR ME, SUCKERS!

MY HIGHLY TUNED THIEVING SENSES HAVE DETECTED THE HINT OF A SCAM HERE...

IF I DIDN'T KNOW ANY BETTER, I'D THINK THEY WERE *USING* US LIKE A BUNCH OF PAWNS IN THEIR GRAND SCHEME TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE! BUT THAT'S JUST CRAZY.

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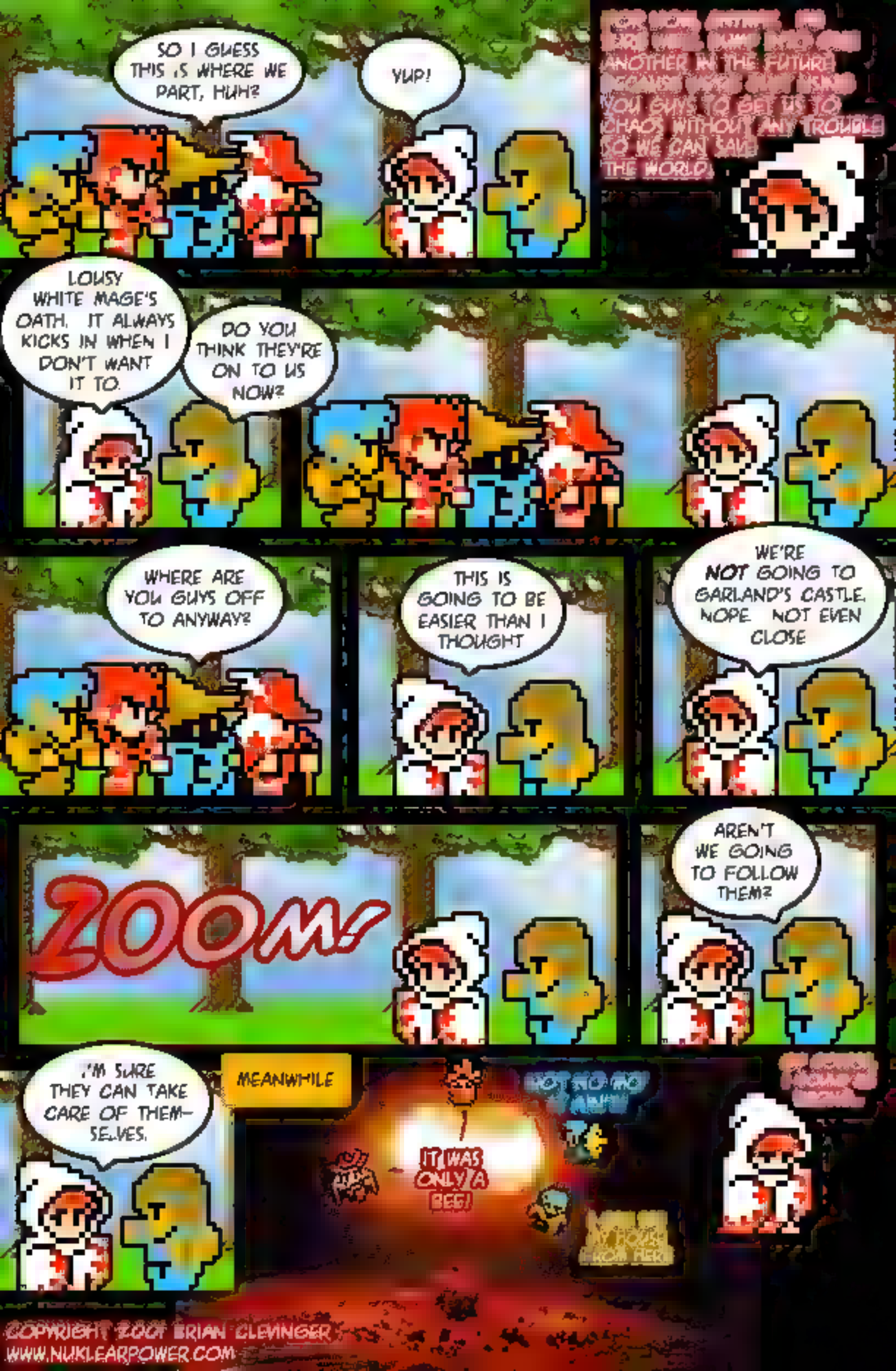
THE FAMILY CIRCUS® By Bil Keane

"Daddy, will you move the sun, please?"

MOVE THE SUN HERE, IT'S FUNNY EVERY TIME!

I AM GOING TO STAB YOU IN THE FACE


SO I GUESS THIS IS WHERE WE PART, HUH?
YUP!
ANOTHER IN THE FUTURE
YOU GUYS GO GET US TO CHAOS WITHOUT ANY TROUBLE SO WE CAN SAVE THE WORLD.
LOUSY WHITE MAGE'S OATH. IT ALWAYS KICKS IN WHEN I DON'T WANT IT TO.
DO YOU THINK THEY'RE ON TO US NOW?
WHERE ARE YOU GUYS OFF TO ANYWAY?
THIS IS GOING TO BE EASIER THAN I THOUGHT
WE'RE NOT GOING TO GARLAND'S CASTLE. NOPE. NOT EVEN CLOSE
ZOOM!
AREN'T WE GOING TO FOLLOW THEM?
I'M SURE THEY CAN TAKE CARE OF THEM-SELVES.
MEANWHILE
IT WAS ONLY A BEE!
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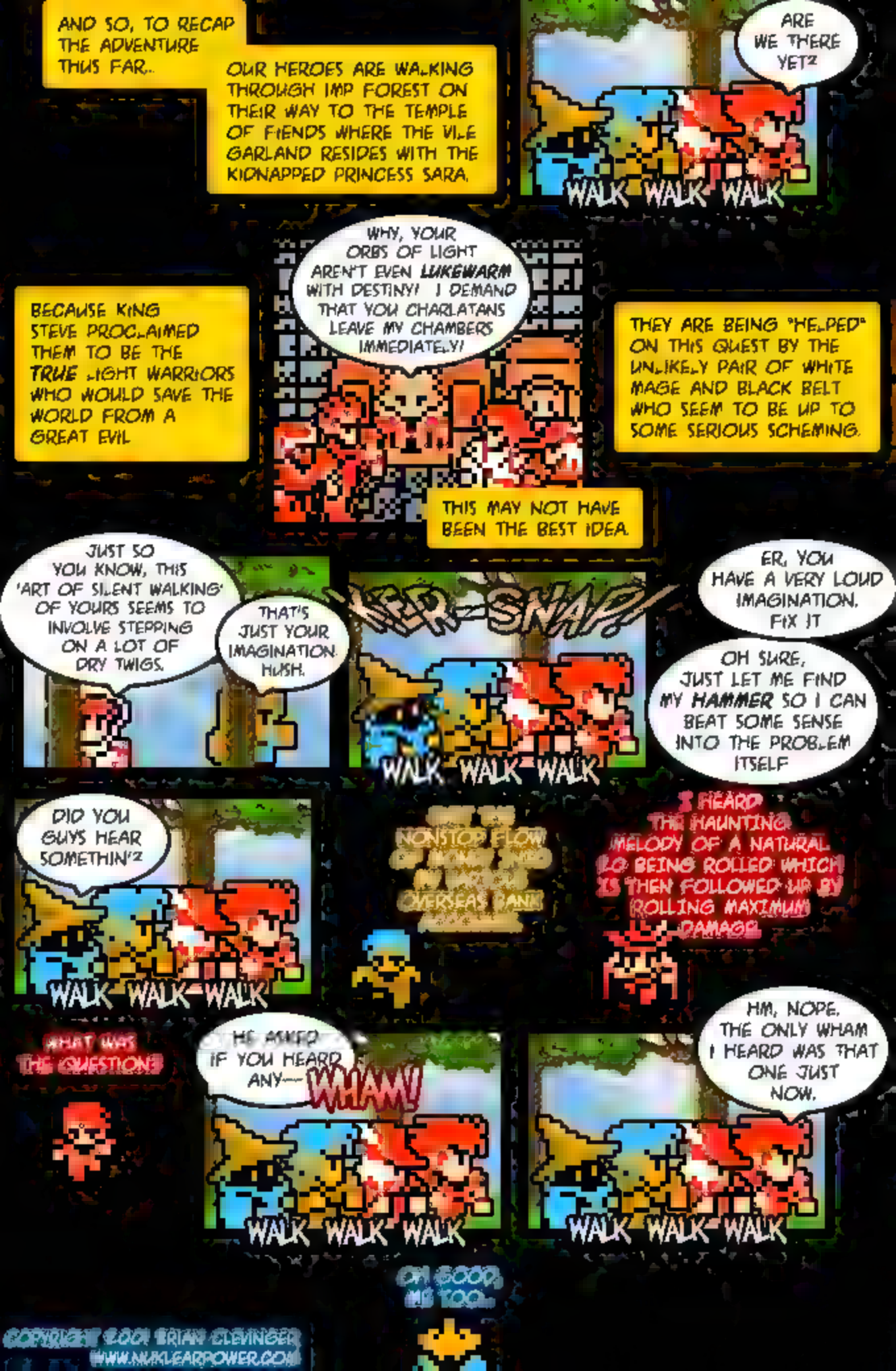
AND SO, TO RECAP THE ADVENTURE THUS FAR..
OUR HEROES ARE WALKING THROUGH IMP FOREST ON THEIR WAY TO THE TEMPLE OF FIENDS WHERE THE VILE GARLAND RESIDES WITH THE KIDNAPPED PRINCESS SARA.
ARE WE THERE YET?
WALK WALK WALK
WHY, YOUR ORBS OF LIGHT AREN'T EVEN LUKEWARM WITH DESTINY! I DEMAND THAT YOU CHARLATANS LEAVE MY CHAMBERS IMMEDIATELY!
BECAUSE KING STEVE PROCLAIMED THEM TO BE THE TRUE LIGHT WARRIORS WHO WOULD SAVE THE WORLD FROM A GREAT EVIL
THEY ARE BEING "HELPED" ON THIS QUEST BY THE UNLIKELY PAIR OF WHITE MAGE AND BLACK BELT WHO SEEM TO BE UP TO SOME SERIOUS SCHEMING.
THIS MAY NOT HAVE BEEN THE BEST IDEA.
JUST SO YOU KNOW, THIS 'ART OF SILENT WALKING' OF YOURS SEEMS TO INVOLVE STEPPING ON A LOT OF DRY TWIGS.
THAT'S JUST YOUR IMAGINATION. HUSH.
KER-SNAP!
WALK WALK WALK
ER, YOU HAVE A VERY LOUD IMAGINATION. FIX IT
OH SURE, JUST LET ME FIND MY HAMMER SO I CAN BEAT SOME SENSE INTO THE PROBLEM ITSELF
DID YOU GUYS HEAR SOMETHIN'?
WALK WALK WALK
NONSTOP FLOW OVERSEAS BANK
I HEARD THE HAUNTING MELODY OF A NATURAL 20 BEING ROLLED WHICH IS THEN FOLLOWED UP BY ROLLING MAXIMUM DAMAGE
WHAT WAS THE QUESTION?
HE ASKED IF YOU HEARD ANY--- WHAM!
WALK WALK WALK
HM, NOPE. THE ONLY WHAM I HEARD WAS THAT ONE JUST NOW.
WALK WALK WALK
OH GOOD, ME TOO.
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THOSE ACCURSED LIGHT WARRIORS ARE NO DOUBT ON THEIR WAY HERE TO RESCUE THE FAIR--YET VERY EVIL--PRINCESS SARA.

WALK WALK WALK

SHE HAS BEEN HARD AT WORK IN THE LIBRARY LATELY. SHE SAID MY BAD GUY SPEEACH WAS NO GOOD SO SHE'S WORKING ON A NEW ONE FOR ME.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT WAS SO BAD ABOUT THEM. I AM GARLAND. WOULD YOU LIKE SOME FRESH BAKED COOKIES?

SNICKER

WALK WALK WALK

I MEAN, JUST BECAUSE I'M EVIL DOESN'T MEAN I HAVE TO BE RUDE. IT'S IMPORTANT TO ME TO BE A GOOD HOST. THAT'S JUST HOW I WAS RAISED, Y'KNOW?

WE ARE LIVING IN A SOCIETY, AFTERALL. WE HAVE RULES. WITHOUT THEM, WE'D BE NO BETTER THAN... THAN...

HEH... HEHEHE

WALK WALK WALK

FOREST IMPS!

AHEM. BUT EVIL PRINCESS SARA WON'T HAVE ANY OF THAT. YOU KNOW, SOMETIMES I WONDER IF SHE'S GETTING INTO THIS A LITTLE TOO MUCH.

BWAHAHAHAHA!

IT'S ALMOST LIKE SHE ENJOYS PLAYING OUT THIS EVIL SIDE. I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE SHE GOT THAT EVIL OUTFIT.

BUT I'M SURE I'M WORRYING ABOUT NOTHING. WHAT'S SHE GONNA DO, USURP ME AS THE MAIN VILLAIN WHEN I'M CLEARLY THE SUPERIOR EVIL-DOER?

DAMMIT, FIGHTER! STOP THINKING ABOUT THE FAMILY CIRCUS!

SO... HILARIOUS. HEH... CAN'T... HELP IT! LITTLE BILLY'S COMICS. GENIUS. TEE HEE!

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IS THE FRONT WINDOW BUSTED?
WHO'S GOING FIRST
I'LL SHARE THE BACK ROW WITH WHOMEVER WANTS ME TO STAB THEM REPEATEDLY BACK OFF
FREE SWORDS!
I'LL STICK NEAR, THOUGH NOT ACTUALLY IN, THE BACK ROW I TAKE HITS LIKE A LITTLE SCHOOL GIRL
FREE ~~SWORDS!~~ EXPERIENCE!
FAIR ENOUGH. AT ANY RATE I'D MUCH RATHER BE STUCK NEXT TO YOU THAN FIGHTER. MAYBE WE CAN EXCHANGE THEORIES AND PRACTICES OF EVIL IN BETWEEN BATTLES. LEMME JUST FIND MY LIST.
UH...
FREE ~~SWORDS!~~ ~~EXPERIENCE~~ GOLD!
THIEF? RED MAGE? MORON?
HA! GIVE ME SOME CREDIT I KNOW A TRICK WHEN I SEE ONE. I WON'T FALL FOR THAT SO EASILY
FREE PIE!
FREE PIE! THE PIE IS ALSO EVIL
IT'S ALMOST TOO EASY
FREE PIE! THE PIE IS ALSO EVIL
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I DON'T KNOW SEE, MY POSTER WAS INSPIRING. BUT THIS PAINTING OF ME YOU HAD COMMISSIONED IS JUST ALL WRONG. THAT DOESN'T EVEN LOOK LIKE ME.

LOOK, WOULD YOU JUST SHUT UP ABOUT THE RENOVATIONS! I FINISHED YOUR SPEECH, I CAPTURED THE LIGHT WARRIORS. ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS WALK INTO THE DUNGEON AND READ THE SCRIPT NOW MARCH!

MAN, I CAN'T *BELIEVE* YOU GUYS WERE STUPID ENOUGH TO GET CAUGHT. SHEESH.

SMILE.

HOW ARE *WE* STUPID IF *YOU* GOT CAUGHT TOO, HM?

BM'S RAZOR SHARP WIT CUTS AN ANSWER FROM A MYRIAD OF LIES!

I MEANT TO GET CAPTURED!

A WIZARD DID IT

HADOKEN THEM INTO THE GRAVE!

DON'T CHANGE THE SUBJECT

RIGHT ANYWAY, WHERE DO YOU THINK WE ARE?

THE SUBJECT BEING THAT YOU'RE STUPID.

KINDA LOOKS LIKE A DUNGEON

MEANWHILE... ELSE WHERE IN THE CASTLE

WHERE'D YOU GET ALL THIS HIGH-TECH EQUIPMENT?!

DUNGEON-CAM

A WIZARD DID IT, ANYWAY! THAT'S NOT IMPORTANT NOW.

A WIZARD?! THAT DOESN'T EVEN MAKE SENSE. I WANT HIS NAME, HIS *TRUE NAME* IF POSSIBLE.

DUNGEON-CAM

LOOK, DO YOU ACCEPT THE EXISTENCE OF WAR-MECHS?

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YOU'D HAVE TO BE A FOOL NOT TO.

DUNGEON-CAM

OKAY THEN SO, WHAT'S WRONG WITH A WAR-ROOM?

STILL, IT SEEMS AWFULLY EXTRAVAGANT, DON'T YOU THINK?

DUNGEON-CAM

THAT'S WHAT VILLAINS ARE! IT'S WHAT SEPARATES THEM FROM BANDITS AND JACKEYS!

I SUPPOSE YOU'RE RIGHT, AND ALL THIS STUFF CERTAINLY IS IMPRESSIVE LOOKING. I'M SURE TO MAKE IT BIG NOW!

DUNGEON-CAM

WELL, WHEN YOU SPEND HALF OF YOUR LIFE IN AND OUT OF VILLAINS' HIDEOUTS, YOU PICK UP A FEW POINTERS. NOW TO TAKE CARE OF OUR GUESTS.

IS THIS WHERE MY FRESH BAKED COOKIES COME INTO THE MASTER PLAN?

DUNGEON-CAM

ARE YOU EVEN TRYING?

HEY, WHAT HAPPENED TO THE DUNGEON-CAM?

DUNGEON-CAM

UGH. IF THOSE MORONS MANAGED TO ESCAPE WHILE I WAS TRYING TO [illegible] THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTUALLY BEING EVIL FOR THE PURPOSES OF VILLAINY

DON'T WORRY, EVIL PRINCESS SARA. I'LL GO CHECK ON THEM.

I HOPE IT'S WARM ENOUGH IN THERE. THE GUEST DUNGEON CAN GET AWFUL DRAFTY THIS TIME OF YEAR.

FIRE

MORE FIRE

SMILE! KNIFE IN THE BACK.

BLACK MAGE

FIGHTER

HOW DID YOU NOT ONLY MISS US, BUT MANAGE TO ZAP YOURSELF?

THEY'VE GOT TWO MAGES IN THEIR PARTY. OF COURSE I HAD A WALL SPELL CAST ON THE DUNGEON WALLS

AND NOW THAT FIGHTER'S BEEN TAKEN OUT--

NOT SO FAST, RM!

BUT... HOW?!

TA-DA!

HECK, BLACK MAGE DOES THAT ALL THE TIME!

AND IT NEVER FUGGIN' WORKS!

HI GUYS. SO HOW ARE THINGS?

CAN I GET YOU ANY-THING? PERHAPS SOME FRESH COOKIES.

THERE'S SOME MR PIBB IN THE FRIDGE IF YOU LIKE

SMILE!

DUNGEON-CAM

HE'S RUINING EVERYTHING!

OKAY, SO THAT'S TWO MR PIBBS, A DR. PEPPER, AN RC COLA, A BUCKET OF CHEESY CHIPS, SOME CHOCOLATE BARS, A CHOCOLATE BAR IN THE SHAPE OF A SWORD, AND A GIANT BOWL OF POPCORN. ANYTHING ELSE I CAN GET YOU?

ER, NO. THAT'LL... UH BE JUST FINE THANKS.

GREAT I'LL BE BACK IN A FEW MINUTES WITH YOUR ORDER

SMILE

DID YOU SEE THAT?!

GARLAND IS SO *HIDEOUSLY* EVIL THAT HE CAN AFFORD TO BE *NICE* BEFORE HE *KILLS* US!

HE MUST BE SO POWERFUL THAT EVEN THE *SHINIEST* SWORD COULD NOT SAVE US NOW!

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OKAY SO WE KNOW THAT GARLAND IS SO EVIL AND POWERFUL THAT WE DON'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST HIM IN A HEAD-ON ATTACK.

SMILE!

RIGHT!

THEREFORE I PROPOSE THE FOLLOWING: RATHER THAN WAITING FOR OUR EVENTUAL AND PAINFUL DEMISE, WE SURPRISE ATTACK GARLAND THE VERY INSTANT HE

THAT'S ALL WELL AND GOOD, RM, BUT WE HAVEN'T MUCH TIME BEFORE THE FIEND GETS BACK!

SMIL

THAT'S WHERE MY ASTOUNDING COLLECTION OF STATS, FEATS, BONUSES, AND SPECIALIZATIONS COME INTO PLAY. I SHALL DEVELOP A BRILLIANT PLAN OF ATTACK THROUGH A MERE ROLL OF THE DICE!

THIS PLAN OF HIS BEST INVOLVE AN AND SWORDS AND HITTING PEOPL WITH THE SWORDS

AND JUST HOW DO YOU PROPOSE TO DO THAT?

I THOUGHT ALL THESE ALLEGED 'STATS' OF YOURS WERE GEARED TOWARD COMBAT AND MAGIC, NOT THINKING.

SMIL

SO TRUE, BM. SO TRUE. THUS, I MUST INVOKE THE MOST HALLOWED AND POWERFUL ART KNOWN TO MY SECRET CABAL...

SO, FAR I'D HAVE TO IT'S THE POWER OF BEING STUPID

IT IS KNOWN AMONG MY KIND AS...

THE RITE OF STAT SWAP!

BY SIMPLY ALTERING MY OTHER STATS, I CAN CHANNEL THEIR POINTS INTO MY INTELLIGENCE SCORE, THUS MAKING ME PHENOMENONALLY SMART!

SMILE!

SCRIBBLE
ERASE
SCRIBBLE

SMIL

WE'RE AS GOOD AS DEAD.

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ALL RIGHT. USING MY ARTIFICIALLY ENHANCED INTELLIGENCE, I HAVE JUST CONCOCTED AN AMAZING SCHEME TO GET US OUT OF HERE.

REALLY? I COULDA SWORN ALL YOU DID WAS CHANGE SOME NUMBERS ON YOUR 'CHARACTER SHEET' AND THEN ROLL A FEW DICE.

PRECISELY!

I'LL LET YOU GUYS PERUSE IT AND BE AMAZED BY MY INCREDIBLE INTELLECT.

I'LL BE AMAZED IF THIS PLAN OF YOURS DOESN'T COMPLETELY SUCK.

RED MAGE'S GREAT ESCAPE PLAN VER 1.0

1. GARLAND ARRIVES WITH OUR TASTY SNACKS.

2. BLACK MAGE ZAPS GARLAND WITH A A SUPER FIREBALL.

3. FIGHTER USES A THUS FAR UNSEEN VARGAS-DO SWORD TECHNIQUE TO CRIPPLE GARLAND.

4. THIEF USES GARLAND'S CREDIT CARDS TO RACK UP IMMENSE CHARGES AT ONLINE PORN SITES TO SIMULTANEOUSLY RUIN HIS CREDIT RATING AND REPUTATION.

5. LEVEL UP! STR +1 CHA +1 CON +1 WIS +1 DEX +1 INT +1

RED MAGE RECIEVES EXPERIENCE BONUSES FOR THE ENCOUNTER. THEY INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO: MAKING A PLAN, MAKING A PLAN THAT WORKED, MAKING A PLAN THAT SAVES THE DAY, AND STAYING IN CHARACTER.

6. YAY! LIGHT-WARRIORS RETURN TRIUMPHANTLY CORNERIA WHERE THEY ARE HERALDED AS THE GREATEST HEROES OF ALL TIME.

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SO, WHAT DO YOU GUYS THINK?

I LIKE MY PART!

ME TOO!

WELL, AT LEAST I SHALL DIE AS I HAVE LIVED, COMPLETELY SURROUNDED BY MORONS.

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ALL RIGHT EVERYONE GARLAND'LL BE HERE ANY MOMENT! PLACES!

WHAT THE HELL IS THIEF DOING?!

I'M A THIEF WE ATTACK FROM THE SHADOWS.

SHADOWS I CAN UNDERSTAND BUT YOU'RE ON THE ROOF

YOU'RE ONE TO TALK.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

HERE WENT MY PLAN TO ACCIDENTALLY MURDER YOU FOOL!

SMI

LOOK, JUST KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR GARLAND

SENSES DETECT THE DISTINCTIVE CLINK-CLANK OF GARLAND'S ARMORED BOOTS HEADING THIS WAY!

SMILE!

SMILE!

SMILE!

SMILE!

WHERE IS HE ALREADY? I'M STARTING TO CRAMP UP.

HEY THERE GUYS! I'VE GOT YOUR FOOD RIGHT HERE. HOLD ON WHILE I UNLOCK THE DOOR.

THERE'S SO MUCH FOOD, I CAN'T FIT THE CART IN HERE OH WELL. WHO GOT THE POP CORN?

STAY TUNED FOR THE THRILLING CONCLUSION LATER THIS WEEK!

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SMILE!

C'MON NOW GUYS. THESE SNACKS AREN'T GOING TO EAT THEMSELVES! DIG IN!

SMILE!

I'D FEEL BAD ABOUT IT, BUT IT'S RED MAGE'S FAULT SINCE THIS WAS HIS DUMB PLAN.

OH YEAH, I CAN ONLY DO ONE HADOKEN PER DAY. DAMNED LEVEL 4 SPELLS.

EHEH. YEAH, YOU'D THINK I WOULD'VE REMEMBERED THAT WHAT WITH MY SUPER BOOSTED INTELLIGENCE AND EVERYTHING. AHEM. NEW PLAN. THIEF GET UM!

WHAM!

SMILE!

MY ARMS GOT TIRED.

FIGHTER! YOU'RE OUR ONLY HOPE NOW! OUR CHANCES OF VICTORY REST SQUARELY ON YOUR SHOULDERS! DO YOU HAVE THE ENCUMBERANCE RATING TO CARRY US THROUGH THE TREACHEROUS PATH OF TRIUMPH!

SMILE!

FIGHTER?

MILE!

THIS POP-CORN IS *GREAT!* IT'S JUST BUTTERY ENOUGH WITHOUT GOING OVER BOARD

WE HAVE CLEARLY REACHED THE POINT WHERE ONLY *RAMPANT* AND *UNCHECKED* STABBING CAN SAVE US.

AND MY FIRST ACT AS SELF-APPOINTED STARMASTER IS TO SLAY MY COMRADES!

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FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER.

OKAY, SO THE SNACKS WERE REALLY GOOD

THEY DID MAKE A TASTY LAST MEAL

OH, YOU GUYS. IT WAS NOTHING. NOW THEN, IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE I CAN DO FOR YA?

WELL, NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT

SMILE!

DON'T KILL US!

PSSST! THEY'RE ON THEIR KNEES

SMILE!

I'M NOT GOING TO KILL YOU. HEH. ANYWAY, GOTTA GO BACK TO THE CONTROL ROOM.

STILL GROVELING

SMILE!

SEE YA!

DID YOU GUYS HEAR THAT?! HE SAID HE WOULDN'T KILL US!

KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS?

HE'S GOING TO TORTURE US UNTIL WE BEG FOR DEATH!

MEANWHILE OUTSIDE THE CASTLE...

WELL, THIS IS WHERE THEIR TRAIL ENDS. WHERE COULD THEY HAVE GOTTEN OFF TO?

IF ONLY THERE WAS A SIGN!

WELL, THAT'LL DO.

FREE PIE! THE PIE IS ALSO EVIL

I DON'T SEE WHY YOU'RE MAKING SUCH A BIG DEAL OUT OF THIS. THEY ARE OUR GUESTS. IT WOULD BE RUDE NOT TO FEED THEM.

BRIAN-CAM

WHAT PART OF THIS WHOLE VILLAIN THING DO YOU NOT UNDERSTAND?

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WHILE THE LIGHT WARRIORS PREPARE FOR THE *ARDUOUS* BATTLE AHEAD OF THEM...

MUMBLE, GONNA DIE, PRAY SM, HATE FIGHTER, PLEAD, WHY, ME, GRUMBLE, SO MUCH TO LIVE FOR, BEG...

(AGAIN WITH THE KNEELING)

AND THE FORCES OF EVIL RALLY THEMSELVES AGAINST THE COMING DAWN...

SPIDEY-CAM

I'M TIRED OF YOUR *BUNGLING* I'M TAKING YOU TO THE DUNGEON PERSONALLY AND WE'LL TAKE CARE OF THIS LITTLE LIGHT WARRIOR *INFESTATION* ONCE AND FOR ALL!

A POWER OF PURE AND *INCOMPARABLE* HORROR--UNWATCHED-- GATHERS ITS MIGHT IN THE DARKNESS...

THE R FRENZED CALLS ECHOING THROUGH THE ANCIENT HALLS-- **KEEHEEHEEHEEHEE!** --ARE ENOUGH TO DRIVE A SANE MIND TO THE BRINK OF MADNESS.

SO IMAG NE WHAT THEY'RE CAPABLE OF AGAINST A *SUCKER* LIKE GARLAND...

KEEHEEHEE!

DID YOU HEAR THAT?

IT'S JUST THE CASTLE SETTLING.

LORD CHAOS, BLESS THIS UNHOLY LAIR OF DARKNESS

IF YOU SAY SO.

LORD CHAOS, UNHOLY DARKNESS

UNDERWATER SQUAD OF DEATH. ATTACK!

Evil... Kids know how to do it. Adult tyrants and despots need to rediscover it.

HM? OH, SORRY. IT'S JUST THAT THESE POSTERS OF YOURS NEVER CEASE TO REPULSE ME

WHY ARE WE STOPPING HERE?

ANYWAY, LET'S GET MOVING. THOSE LIGHT WARRIORS NEED TO BE TAUGHT A LESSON IN PAIN!

GOOD EVIL LINE.

I'M STILL NOT SO SURE ABOUT THIS. BEING A VILLAIN IS ALL SO NEW TO ME.

THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT

JUST FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS, OKAY?

LET'S SEE HERE... "I, GARLAND, DESTROYER OF WORLDS WILL BE AS AN ENDLESS PLAGUE UPON YOUR LANDS..." WOW. THIS IS REALLY GOOD STUFF.

OF COURSE IT IS, YOU DOLT. I WROTE IT.

MAN, THOSE LIGHT WARRIORS DON'T STAND A CHANCE!

IMO FAKE SPEECH

IMO FAKE SPEECH

SNITCH!

IMO FAKE SPEECH

IMO FAKE

EVIL PRINCESS SARA, DIDN'T YOU SEE—

QUIT DAWDLING AND MOVE IT!

IMO FAKE

I COULDVE SWORN...

IMO FAKE

I CAN'T WAIT TO DOUBLE CROSS THAT MORON...

MEANWHILE, BACK IN THE GUEST DUNGEON, THE LIGHT WARRIORS ARE HATCHING A FOOLPROOF PLAN TO ESCAPE!

...SO YOU SEE, BY ALLOWING ME TO KILL YOU THREE, I'LL BE ABLE TO AT LEAST DIE WITH SOME DIGNITY

AND SMILE

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I TOLD YOU I WOULDVE LEVELED UP FIRST

GARLAND! AT LAST WE MEET! AGAIN, SIR, THE WALL

JUST MAKE IT QUICK

IMP FAKE SPEECH

OKAY, GARLAND, THIS IS IT. THIS IS YOUR CHANCE TO SHINE. THIS IS YOUR MOMENT IN THE SUN. OR, WAIT, SHOULDN'T IT BE MY MOMENT IN THE DARK, SINCE I'M EVIL...

ANYWAY, JUST DON'T SCREW THIS UP. ALL YOU'VE GOT TO DO IS READ FROM YOUR SCRIPT.

I'LL JUST OPEN UP THE OL' SCROLL HERE AND...

Imp Fake Speech

by Impish McImp

all work and no play makes Garland a DEAD MAN.

WELL!

BUT SARA, THIS ISN'T WHAT YOU--

JUST DO IT ALREADY!

SMILE!

UM...

IMP FAKE SPEECH

SMILE!

SO. UH... EHEH. I... YOU.

IMP FAKE SPEECH

SMILE!

COUGH!

IMP FAKE SPEECH

SMILE!

WHY WOULD THEY DRAW THAT?

IMP FAKE SPEECH

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SMILE.

OKAY. THERE'S NO NEED TO PANIC. I'LL JUST HAVE TO IMPROV SOME-THING.

IMP FAKE SPEECH

SOMETHING SO EVIL, SO VILE SO ***MEAN*** THAT THE LIGHT WARRIORS WILL GIVE UP WITHOUT A FIGHT

TAKING SO LONG

I'M TIRED OF BEING FROZEN IN TERROR

YEAH, WE SHOULD HURRY UP AND KILL HIM

I, GARLAND, WILL UH... KNOCK YOU ALL DOWN!

WHY ME?

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SMILE!

IMP FAKE SPEECH

BWA HAHA HAHAHAHA!

THAT WENT EVEN BETTER THAN I COULD'VE ***DREAMED!***

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!

ISN'T IT OBVIOUS? MY SPEECH WAS SO EVIL THAT IT ***SNAPPED*** THEIR MINDS LIKE LITTLE BRITTLE ***TWIGS!***

THE ONLY THING THAT HAS ***SNAPPED*** AROUND HERE LATELY IS MY ***PATIENCE!***

I WANT TO KNOW ***HOW*** YOU SCREWED THIS UP, GARLAND GIVE ME THAT SPEECH ***NOW!***

IMP FAKE

IMP FAKE SPEECH

SNAP!!

IMP FAKE SPEECH

CONSIDERING THE CONTENTS OF THIS PAPER RIGHT HERE IN MY HANDS, I THINK YOU'LL FIND MY SPEECH A WORK OF ABSOLUTE ***GENIUS!***

SEE? CONSIDERING WHAT I HAD TO WORK WITH, I'D SAY I DID AN EXCELLENT JOB.

YES. AN *EXCELLENT* JOB.

B-BUT BUT I... THIS, THIS ISN'T *HOW*?!

I DON'T GET IT! THIS WASN'T HERE BEFORE! IT WAS A "DEATH THREAT DIRECTED AT *ME*!

BUT YOUR PUNISHMENT WILL HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL WE DISPATCH THESE "HEROES"

Villainy Instructions
by Evil Princess Sara

"I, Garland, destroyer of souls, will ~~be~~ ~~bring~~ ~~plague~~ upon your lands.

DUR!

BY IMPO MPICARIO

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE! WHAT COULD'VE HAPPENED TO THAT PAP—

THAT LAUGHTER! IT--IT *CAN'T* BE!

BUT IT *IS*!

WOULD YOU MIND EXPLAINING THIS?

NEEDLESS TO SAY, YOU WILL BE PUNISHED IN A SEVERE AND BLOOD-CURDLING MANNER, AND I MEAN THAT *LITERALLY*.

YEEEEARGHBLBLBLBLBLE!!!

SHOOOM!

SMILE!

I'LL BE BACK WITH YOUR *DOOM* IN JUST A MOMENT

SMILE!

'KAY

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WALK WALK

ER YEAH, Y'KNOW FOR TREASURES AND STUFF

HOW DOES THE WORLD OWE US FOR DOING THE RIGHT THING?

OKAY WE'LL TALK ABOUT THE ETHICAL RAMIFICATIONS OF USING DESTINY FOR PROFIT LATER

WELL, IF YOU *REALLY* BELIEVE THAT WE'RE ALL JUST PLAYING OUT PRE-DESTINED ROLES TO SAVE THE WORLD, THEN *TECHNICALLY* WE'VE ALREADY WON.

IT'S JUST A MATTER OF CATCHING UP WITH FATE

WALK WALK

HOW DID YOU GET US LOST?!

I SEE AND IT DOESN'T BOTHER YOU AT ALL THAT WE'RE DOING THIS *INSTEAD* OF FULFILLING OUR DESTINY?

RIGHT NOW, I'M MORE WORRIED ABOUT OUR DECOYS. THEY COULD BE IN DANGER

I *KNEW* IT! WE *ARE* LOST! GRAH!

WE'RE NOT LOST WE'RE, UH... *EXPLORING*.

"EXPLORING"?

NOT REALLY. I FIGURE THE WORLD OWES US--OR OR IT *WILL* OWE US WHEN WE TRIUMPH AS PER OUR DESTINY. SO WHAT'S WRONG WITH TAKING SOME NOW?

IF YOU'RE SO HUNG UP ON THIS WHOLE 'DESTINY' THING, THEN YOU *SHOULDN'T* BE WORRYING.

I THINK I SAW A TREASURE CHEST AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE.

SPEAKING FROM A PURELY PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE, W'ERE NOT *LOST* SO MUCH AS *SPATIALLY DISPLACED*.

HOW DO YOU FIGURE THAT?

YOU *FAILED* PHILOSOPHY, DIDN'T YOU

BIG TIME

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WHAT I WANT TO KNOW IS TH,S: ***HOW*** DID YOU GET US LOST?!

LOOK. THIS ISN'T AS EASY AS I MAKE IT LOOK, Y'KNOW. IT'S NOT LIKE THIS IS SOME ORDINARY RUN DOWN CASTLE. THIS IS THE ***TEMPLE OF FIENDS!*** ***FIENDS,*** I SAY! DO YOU HAVE ANY ***IDEA*** WHAT THAT ***DOES*** TO A PLACE? HM? DO YOU?! THIS IS THE ***ARCHITECTURE OF INSANITY!*** THE TOWERS OF ***MADNESS!***

SO EXCUSE ME IF WE HAVE TROUBLE NAVIGATING THROUGH THE ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY IMBUED WITHIN THESE WALLS.

'ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY'? 'ARCHITECTURE OF INSANITY'? WHAT ARE YOU ***BABBLING*** ABOUT?!

THIS CASTLE ***ISN'T*** SOME TWISTED EXPERIMENT IN NON-EUCLIDEAN GEO-METRY! IT WASN'T ERECTED BY DEMONS OF MADNESS, AND IT'S ***NOT*** BUILT ON PURELY THEORETICAL ESCHER-TERIC PHYSICS.

IT'S A ***STRAIGHT RUN!*** A BLIND, MENTALLY DEFICIENT ***MONKEY*** COULD'VE FOUND H,S WAY!

YO!

GOAL!

START

THESE MONKEYS OF WH,CH YOU SPEAK ARE THEY MENTALLY DEFIC,ENT BY ***HUMAN*** OR ***MONKEY*** STANDARDS?

BECAUSE THAT COULD REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

IF YA THINK ABOUT IT.

IN SOME CASES, I'M NOT SO SURE

MEANWHILE...

HEH HEH HEH...

THOSE IMPS WILL ***NEVER*** SEE ME COMING WITH THIS PERFECT DISGUISE

THEY JUST DON'T KNOW WHO THEY'RE MESSING WITH.

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THERE YOU ARE

NOW GET BACK TO THE GUEST DUNGEON AND DESTROY THOSE *MEDDLESOME* LIGHT WARRIORS!

ER, UM. AHEM--I THINK YOU MUST HAVE ME CONFUSED FOR SOMEBODY ELSE

I AM *NOT* BELIEVING THIS.

GARLAND WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS, SO IF--

GARLAND? WHO IS GARLAND? I AM . UH

BARRY

BUT I'D HAVE TO SAY, AND THIS IS A COMPLETELY UNBIASED OPINION MIND YOU

IT SOUNDS LIKE THIS GARLAND GUY IS REALLY EVIL AND GOOD LOOKING

AND YOU SHOULD GO EASY ON HIM REMEMBER, THIS IS HIS FIRST TIME BEING A *REAL* VILLAIN

GARLAND--

BARRY

OKAY, 'BARRY' IF YOU SEE GARLAND, LET HIM KNOW THAT I WILL *PERSONALLY* CARVE THE WORD "*AGONY*" OVER *EVERY* INCH OF HIS FLESH WITH A *RUSTY KNIFE*

SINCE YOU PUT IT THAT WAY-- AHEM--I MEAN, I'M PRETTY SURE I SAW GARLAND IN THE VICINITY OF THE GUEST DUNGEON I'LL JUST GO RELAY THAT MESSAGE OF YOURS.

I JUST HOPE THIS DISGUISE WORKS ON THE IMPS AS WELL AS IT HAS ON SARA!

MERE MOMENTS LATER, ON THE WAY TO THE GUEST DUNGEON...

ACCURSED FIEND! WHAT WERE THE ODDS THAT HE'D RUN INTO US WITHIN THIS *IMPOSSIBLE* MAZE!

IT'S JUST *ONE* HALL! HOW COULD HE *NOT* FIND US?

THREE MINUTES LATER, *IN* THE GUEST DUNGEON.

SO, HOW'S IT GOIN'?

'ILE!

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IMAGINATION

It's the only way you'll escape the hell hole that is your life.

HEROES

VILLAIN

ALSO VILLAIN

VAT O' ACID

HOW COULD YOU TAKE THIS LONG AND STILL NOT HAVE DEFEATED

I DON'T KNOW IT SEEMS LIKE SUCH A SIMPLE TASK. YOU'D THINK WE'D BE PAST THIS BY NOW

IF ONLY I COULD FREE MYSELF

AND THEN PERFORM SOME DARING ACT TO FREE THE REST OF US?

UM... SURE, I GUESS. FOR A PRICE OF COURSE

IN RETROSPECT I REALLY SHOULD HAVE SEEN THAT COMING

I HAVE FORMULATED YET ANOTHER *BRILLIANT* PLAN!

OH GOOD BECAUSE THAT *FIRST* 'BRILLIANT PLAN' OF YOURS WORKED OUT SO WELL THAT IT GOT US *HERE* IN THE FIRST PLACE

NO, NO, NO. THIS ONE'S *MUCH* BETTER. IT DEPENDS *ENTIRELY* ON FIGHTER

I WOULD JUMP INTO THE ACID RIGHT THIS MINUTE NOW JUST TO SAVE TIME, BUT THEN I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO HEAR YOUR OWN HORRIBLE ACIDY SCREAMS OF DEATH

ALL RIGHT, HERE'S THE PLAN, FIGHTER.

FIGHTER, YOU'VE GOT TO LISTEN VERY, *VERY* CAREFULLY

OUR VERY *LIVES* DEPEND ON YOU.

FIGHTER!

MY BRAIN FEELS KINDA FUZZY

PROBABLY BECAUSE I'VE NEVER GOTTEN BLOOD TO IT BEFORE.

NEVER NOTICE HOW—

IF THIS HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH SWORDS, I'LL BE STABBING YOU WHILE WE'RE IN THE ACID

NEVERMIND

YOU'VE GOT THE BEST STRENGTH STAT, FIGHTER. SO WE'RE GOING TO PERFORM A *STAT CHECK* AGAINST YOUR STRENGTH TO SEE IF YOU CAN BREAK THESE ROPES WITH YOUR *MIGHTY* MUSCLES!

WAIT WON'T THAT JUST *ACCELERATE* OUR TRIP INTO THE ACID?

TO BE HONEST, IF THE PLAN HAS ANY FLAWS, IT WOULD BE THAT THE *WHOLE THING* REALLY HINGES UPON A BEST CASE SCENARIO IN WHICH WE MANAGE TO AVOID THE ACID

THIS IS THE *BEST* PLAN YOU COULD COME UP WITH?! EVEN *AFTER* YOUR ALLEGED BOOST IN INTELLIGENCE?!

OH *HECK* NO. THAT WORE OFF A *WHILE* AGO. I'M WORKIN' ON PURE *INSTINCT* NOW, BABY!

OH SWEET ZOMBIE *JESUS* ON A POGO-STICK! WE'RE *SCREWED.*

ARE WE GOING TO STAND AROUND ALL DAY, OR ARE WE GONNA *KILL* THEM!

WELL, I *GUESS* IT IS THE VILLAINOUS THING TO DO..

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WILL RM'S PLAN WORK? WILL BM STAB SOMEONE? STAY TUNED FOR ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS AND MORE SATURDAY!

I WOULD JUST LIKE TO REITERATE THAT THIS IS, BY FAR, THE *WORST* PLAN I HAVE EVER HEARD ABOUT *EVER.*

POINT, THIS IS THE *SECOND* WORST PLAN ETC. ETC.

TRUST ME GUYS. *THIS* ONE IS GOING DOWN IN THE HISTORY BOOKS!

3,000 YEARS LATER

EARTH-CHILDREN. OPEN YOUR THISTORY OF THE MOST FATALLY HORRIBLE PLANS AND OTHER PAINFUL EVENTS* COMPU-BOOKS TO THE SECTION ON CARBON-UNIT "RED MAGE."

BUT THERE'S THREE *FULL* CHAPTERS DEVOTED TO THIS 'RED MAGE'.

END OF LINE.

YES. YES THERE ARE. THIS MATERIAL WILL BE ON THE DIGI-TEST.

MAN, I *HATE* THE FUTURE! AND IT'S ALL RED MAGE'S FAULT!

MEANWHILE...

ROLL IT!

PTOOEY!

ALL I'VE GOT TO DO IS GET MY *EMERGENCY* 20-SIDED FROM MY BREAST POCKET BY USING MY TEETH AND THEN.

RATHER TELLING OF THE 'PLAN' AS A WHOLE, DON'T YOU THINK?

I ROLLED MY DICE INTO THE ACID

FSSSH

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WELL, MY PLAN FAILED. ALL WE HAVE TO LOOK FORWARD TO NOW IS THE GREAT RE-ROLL IN THE SKY.

FINE, I'LL BITE. IT'S ONLY THE FINAL MOMENTS OF MY LIFE, WHY SHOULDN'T I WASTE THEM WITH WITLESS BLATHER?

WHAT IS A 'GREAT RE-ROLL IN THE SKY' SUPPOSED TO BE?

IT'S WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DIE

I CAN ONLY PRAY TO SWEET, MERCIFUL GWA THAT HE WON'T GO INTO DETAIL ABOUT IT.

I HATE YOU SO MUCH RIGHT NOW, GWA.

THERE ARE MANY NAMES FOR IT... TARTARUS, NIEFLHEIM, THE TRASH. BUT WHEN YOU DIE, YOUR CHARACTER SHEET GOES THERE AND YOU BECOME NOTHING.

THE GODS RE-ROLL YOUR STATS SO THEY CAN START OVER

IN THIS, WE BECOME REBORN. THOUGH WE MAY START OFF WITH SOME BONUS EXP DUE TO OUR PREVIOUS TIME IN THE MORTAL WORLD, WE RETAIN NO MEMORY OF OUR TIME HERE

[illegible] THING OF [illegible] AGAIN, EH...

CAN I SAY SOMETHING REAL QUICK, HERE?

FOR THE DESTINED SAVIORS OF THE WORLD, YOU GUYS AREN'T THAT BRIGHT...

BLACK MAGE, JUST CAST A BIG, HORRIBLE, DESTRUCTIVE FIREBALL SPELL SO WE CAN GET OUT OF HERE

HE CAN ONLY DO THAT ONCE EVERY DAY.

UM YEAH, BUT IT'S UH NEVER BEEN A PROBLEM BEFORE. I'M ALWAYS READY!

YUP, NOTHING WRONG WITH MY [illegible] THING.

HMM, NO I'M PRETTY SURE IT HAPPENS EVERY SINGLE TIME.

SHUT UP, MAN! I TOLD YOU, IT'S GLANDULAR! I CAN'T HELP IT!

TOO LATE!

TONIGHT: LOOT STAR DUNGEON

WWW.SILKTARROWER.CO

I SUPPOSE I SHALL BEGIN THE UNNECESSARILY SLOW PROCCESS THAT WILL *EVENTUALLY* DEPOSIT THE LIGHT WARRIORS INTO OUR VAT OF *ACIDIC*... ER... ACID

FINALLY...

THAT'S NOT NECESSARY... REALLY... YOU CAN JUST LET US GO. WE PROMISE NOT TO THWART YOUR SCHEMES.

HRRRRMMMMM

THE COWARDLY KIND, WHAT'S LOOK LIKE!

ALL OF THIS HAS BEEN *PRE-ORDAINED* WE ARE BUT PLAYING OUT THE ROLES GIVEN US BY THE FICKLE HAND OF *FATE*. I HAVE BEEN BROUGHT UP IN THE CHURCH OF WHITE MAGERY *KNOWING* THIS. MY ENTIRE *LIFE* HAS BEEN DEDICATED TO PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE AND OUR KNOWLEDGE I, AND I ALONE, WAS CHOSEN BY OUR ORDER TO COMBAT THE GREAT MENACE--NAY--THE *PLAGUE* THAT WOULD BESET ALL THE WORLD...

AND YET.. *HERE* I AM. DANGLING JUST A FEW INCHES FROM MY OWN PAINFUL AND UNDOUBTEDLY *SLOW* DEMISE IS FATE BUT A *GUIDE*? IS IT SOMETHING THAT WE MUST LIVE *UP* TO, OR SOMETHING WE MUST *OVER-COME*? IF *ANYTHING* THAT THE ELDERS TAUGHT ME ABOUT THE WORLD AND OUR ROLE IN IT IS TRUE.. THEN WE *MUST* ESCAPE! SOMETHING, *ANYTHING*, HAS TO HAPPEN!

PLEASE

PLEASE

PLEASE

PLEASE!

DON'T LET IT ALL BE A LIE

PLEASE

AH, HELL. LET'S JUST DROP 'EM!

SPLOOSH!

MUWA HAHAHA!

AND NOT... OH, WHAT'S THE WORD?

ACIDIC?

THIS IS AWFULLY STICKY FOR ACID

YEAH.

GARRRRRRRLAND!

BUT-BUT-BUT I... THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! I FILLED THE VAT OF ACID MYSELF!

WHICH IS PRECISELY WHY YOU WILL BE SEVERELY PUNISHED FOR THIS INCOMPETENT DISPLAY.

MAYBE IT'S A VERY SLOOOOOW ACTING ACID?

KINDA TASTES LIKE MOUNTAIN DEW...

WELL, GARLAND IT'LL BE FITTING WHEN I KILL YOU SLOOOOOWLY WON'T IT?

MEANWHILE, IN THE BACKYARD OF THE TEMPLE OF FIENDS...

KEEHEHEHEHE!

DRAFT CAN OF

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OKAY THEN. TIME TO REASSESS THE S.TUATION. I AM CURRENTLY ANKLE DEEP IN A TUB OF MOUNTAIN DEW I FEAR THAT MY FEET SHALL STINK OF IT FOR ***WEEKS*** TO COME. ON THE BRIGHT SIDE, IT CAN'T POSS.BLY BE ANY WORSE THAN THAT ONE TIME I CAST ***GORGAK'S FOOT FUNK*** ON MYSELF. TO BE FAIR, THAT FIASCO HAD LESS TO DO WITH MISCASTING MAGIC THAN IT DID WITH MY HYGIENE PRACTICES AT THE TIME BUT YOU'VE GOT TO ADM.T, IT WAS ***DAMNED*** .MPRESS.VE ANYWAY. I MEAN, REALLY TO CONJURE UP A DEMON OF FUNK JUST BY STINK.NG UP THE PLACE SO MUCH THAT THE CREATURE TOOK IT AS COMPETITION.. WELL, NOT MANY PEOPLE CAN SAY ***THEY'VE*** DONE THAT, THAT'S FOR SURE. MAN, I'M ***SO*** GLAD NO ONE WILL EVER KNOW THE HORRIBLE, ***HORRIBLE*** TRUTH OF THAT DAY

ER, BUT WHERE WAS I? AH YES. ***REASSESSMENT***

I AM CURRENTLY SURROUNDED BY ENEMIES AND, COINC.DENTALLY, BY ***MORONS***. WELL, OTHER THAN WHITE MAGE, OF COURSE I THINK SHE'S RUBBING UP AGAINST ME... WHICH IS PRETTY COOL MAYBE IT WOULD IMPRESS HER IF I BURNT THE FLESH FROM THE BONES OF EVERYONE ELSE IN THE ROOM, CAPTURED THEIR FRESHLY RELEASED SOULS, DEFILED THEM THROUGH THE 32 PATHS OF THE THREE VEILS OF NEGATIVE EXISTENCE, AND OFFERED THEM UP TO LORD CHAOS TO GAIN FAVOR IN HIS EYES AND THUS F.ND A QU.CK AND HARROW.NG ROAD TO POWER FAR SURPASSING ANYTHING THAT HAS BEEN POSSESSED BY HUMAN HANDS!

AND HELL. IF THAT DIDN'T WORK (YEAH RIGHT) THEN I'D BE POWERFUL ENOUGH TO JUST CONTROL HER MIND ANYWAY AND THAT'S ***LIKE*** TRUE LOVE OR CLOSE ENOUGH FOR SOME HOT MAGE ON MAGE ACTION AT ANY RATE

MMMM... HOT MAGE ON MAGE ACTION..

SNAP OUT OF IT, YOU FOOL! YOU'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF A LIVE OR DEATH SITUATION AND YOU'RE OFF IN HAPPY-FUN-LAND DREAMIN' ABOUT HOO-HOOS AND GAZONGAS!

... .

DAH! YOU DID IT ***AGAIN!*** CONCENTRATE! LIVE IN THE ***NOW!*** YOU'VE GOT AN ARCH-F.END ON ONE S.DE OF YOU AND A REJECT FROM ***XENA*** ON THE OTHER IN MY CORNER, I'VE GOT... CRAP A JACK OF A... TRADES WHO IS ***INCOMPETENT*** IN ALL OF THEM, A TH.EF WHOM I SUSPECT IS CURRENTLY EMPTYING THE CONTENTS OF ONE OF MY ***INNER*** POCKETS (DAMN, HE'S ***TOO*** GOOD), A BLACK BELT OR A MONK OR ***SOMETHING*** WHO MUST BE VERY CONFUSED BECAUSE THIS IS A EURO-MEDIEVAL BASED WORLD, AND A KNIGHT IN TRAINING WHO, LET'S FACE IT, KNOWS MORE ABOUT SCOOBY-DOO THAN HE DOES ABOUT, WE..., EVERYTH.NG E.SE ***COMBINED*** OH, AND THE MEGA-HOTTIE KNOWN AS WHITE MAGE. I'M NOT EXACTLY SURE WHAT IT IS THAT ***SHE*** CONTRIBUTES TO OUR GROUP SHE'S SOME SORT OF MAGE, I CAN GATHER ***THAT*** MUCH FROM HER NAME. BUT HER PARTICULAR BRAND OF MAGERY, IF THIS IS TO BE BE.IEVED, HAS ***NOTHING*** TO DO WITH KILLING. I'M NOT EVEN SURE YOU CAN ***CALL*** IT MAGIC IF SOMEONE DOESN'T ***DIE***. MAKE 'EM EXPLODE OR HAVE THE.R ORGANS TURN INSIDE OUT ***SOMETHING!***

HMM.. SPEAKING OF WH.CH, I THINK I JUST CAME UP WITH A PLAN. AND THIS ONE'S ***BOUND*** TO WORK!

OH. HOW I PITY YOU. UH *PITIFUL* VILLAINS RIGHT NOW

OH *PLEASE*. IF IT'LL MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER, THEN GO AHEAD AND MAKE YOUR LITTLE THREAT

IT'S NOT AS THOUGH THERE'S *ANYTHING* YOU COULD SAY AT THIS POINT THAT WILL CHANGE THE FACT THAT YOU WILL SOON BE CORPSES.

BECAUSE, MS. *STUPID-FACE* YOU *FORGOT* TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THAT I CAN CAST DEVASTINGLY POWERFUL *LEVEL 9 SPELLS!*

WITH BUT THE *SLIGHTEST* TWITCH OF MY MAGEY HANDS, I COULD *EXPLODE* YOU COMPLETELY DEAD. AND IT WOULD BE MESSY SO *THERE*

DON'T LET HIM FOOL YA, LADY HE *ALREADY* CAST HIS LEVEL 9 SPELL FOR THE DAY A WHILE AGO. YOU'RE *STILL* SAFE

SILLY BLACK MAGE. HE ACCIDENTALLY *LIED* TO THE VILLAINS. BUT LUCKILY I REMEMBERED THAT REAL HEROES *ALWAYS* TELL THE TRUTH!

NOW IS NOT THE TIME FOR SARCASM, BUT NOW IS THE TIME FOR NEFARIOUS ACTION.

[illegible] DON'T KNOW ABOUT THAT.

HMM. IT LOOKS LIKE BLACK MAGE IS UP TO SOMETHING. I WONDER WHAT IT COULD BE.

MAYBE IT'S A PLAN THAT'LL GET US OUT OF HERE! I SURE HOPE IT INVOLVES SWORDS AND MIL[illegible] THE SWORDS. I MEAN.

DAMN HIS BEADY LITTLE EYES! HE'S GOT US RIGHT WHERE HE WANTS

WAIT A SECOND. THAT'S NOT RIGHT

LADY, YOU CAN KILL THE REST OF US, BUT I *BEG* OF YOU, LET *ME* FINISH HIM OFF! *PLEASE!*

I'LL CONSIDER IT A LAST REQUEST, OKAY?

[illegible] LOOK, MORE COMICS AT WWW.NUMFAROWED.COM

WHY DON'T YOU JUST CAST SOMETHING *ELSE* FOR ONCE?

NON-LEVEL 9 SPELLS REALLY *AREN'T* MY IDIOM.

BUT YOU CERTAINLY *ARE* AN IDIOT!

BLACK BELT!

YO!

HIT SIR ARMOR OF GOTHIC HERE UNTIL HE STOPS THINKING CONSCIOUS THOUGHTS.

GLADLY!

YA!

POW! SLAM! PUNCH! KICK! PAIN!

I WAS UNAWARE THAT THE MONK CLAS HAD ACCESS TO *POTENCE*

HI-YIYIYIYI!

REPEATING FIST!

OR *CELERITY* FOR THAT MATTER

SHUT UP AND ENJOY THE FREE ASS-WHUPPIN' SHOW

OH, WELL. GUESS IT'S TIME TO CHANGE BACK INTO AN ORDINARY PRINCESS BEFORE ANYONE SUSPECTS ANYTHING OF MY HIDEOUS EVIL TENDENCIES.

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CRACK!

AGONY!

SLAP!

BONK!

MANIACAL SUPERVILLAIN: EXIT STAGE RIGHT

SLAM!

CRUNCH!

KER-SPLORT!

CRASH!

OH SWEET JEEBUS, IT HURTS BAD!

ZOOM!

DID YOU GUYS HEAR SOMETHING STRANGE?

DID I ALREADY ANNOUNCE

ACTUALLY, I THINK I MIGHT HAVE HEARD HIS SPLEEN RUPTURING.

BUT THAT'S HARDLY **STRANGE** WHEN YOU CONSIDER HOW **BRUTALLY** HE'S BEING BEATEN.

SKLORTCH

NO, **THAT** WAS DEFINITELY HIS SPLEEN.

MEANWHILE, ELSEWHERE IN THE CASTLE..

EXCE...ENT THOSE **BUMBLING** LIGHT WARRIORS WILL **NEVER** SUSPECT ME.

WELL, BEING A VIL...AIN WAS A NICE CHANGE OF PACE.

NOTHING MORE TO DO NOW THAN JUST SIT HERE AND WAIT TO BE "RESCUED"

YUP JUST GOTTA RETURN TO MY BORING OL' LIFE AT CORNERIA CASTLE

URGE FOR VI...AINY RISING.

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READY TO GIVE UP, OR SHALL I *PUMMEL* YOU SOME MORE?

COMPUTER, ACTIVATE OMEGA CONTINGENCY!

FOOL! DID YOU ACTUALLY THINK THAT YOU COULD DEFEAT THE MIGHTY GARLAND SO EASILY?!

OMEGA'S ON THE WHAT NOW?

OMEGA PROTOCOL CONFIRMED. REACTOR CORE MELTDOWN INITIATED IN 5... 4... 3... 2... 1...

KA-BOOM

AND THEN THE *UNIVERSE* EXPLODED

TEMPLE OF FIENDS

GAME OVER

IN RETROSPECT, SOMEONE *REALLY* SHOULD'VE THOUGHT TO SAVE JUST IN CASE SOMETHING LIKE THIS HAPPENED.

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GOT A BAD CASE OF THE MONDAYS?

THAT'S WHY LORD CHAOS INVENTED

CAT-COFFEE!

WE ARE CLEARLY DEALING WITH A DERANGED INDIVIDUAL.

OH THANK EVIL! WHITE MAGE IS UP AHEAD

BLAH BLAH BLAH SNICKERS ARE COOL BLAH BLAH SO THEN BLAH DRAGONS EVERYWHERE BLAH

WHY AM I STUCK WITH THIS NIMROD?

AND THERE IS ABSOLUTELY **NO** CHANCE IN ANY OF THE THOUSAND HELLS THAT I WOULD EVER, EVER, EVER, EVER, EVER, **EVER**, SO MUCH AS WALK AROUND WITH YOU UNLESS UNDER **EXTREME** DURESS.

SO YOU'RE STUCK WITH FIGHTER

I SEE NOW, JUST HOW **MUCH** DURESS ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

LIKE ENOUGH TO BOIL A POT OF WATER?

OR ENOUGH TO KILL A RABID ELEPHANT?

IF THE CONTENTS OF THE **ENTIRE** UNIVERSE WERE TO COLLAPSE INTO A **SINGLE** POINT, IT **STILL** WOULD NOT BE ENOUGH DURESS. I DON'T LIKE YOU.

WANNA TEST THAT HUNCH?

SORRY.

GEEZ, ISN'T BLACK BELT DONE HURTING GARLAND YET?

WELL, YOU HAVE TO SAY THIS ABOUT H.M. HE'S THOROUGH.

IF YOU ASK ME, YOU CAN'T GET MORE THOROUGH THAN A DOSE OF ULTIMA. IT'S 10 GALLONS OF KICKIN' ASS IN A 5 GALLON JUG.

DO YOU *KNOW* THAT SPELL?

WELL NOT AS *SUCH*, NO.

SEE, ULTIMA BELONGS TO THE THEORETICAL *TENTH* SPELL LEVEL.

BUT IT'S A *REALLY* AWESOME SPELL. IN THEORY SEE, FIRST YOU'VE GOT TO SPLIT AN ATOM BY FOCUSING YOUR WILLPOWER INTO--

HERE'S BLACK BELT NOW!

KINDA STICKY

YOU'RE GETTING BLOOD ON MY ARMOR.

YOU CALL ME EVIL? BUT THAT GUY JUST BEAT SOMEONE TO DEATH WITH HIS BARE HANDS!

ISH. AND YOU GOT SOME IN MY HAIR TOO!

AND YOU RUN AROUND THE OVERWORLD MAP WITH HIM LIKE IT WAS NOTHING!

I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE TO TAKE ARMOR TO GET IT CLEANED.

IT'S DIFFERENT WHEN *HE* KILLS SOMEONE. HE'S A MONK

TELL ME HOW RIGOROUS IS THE ENTRANCE EXAM FOR MONK COLLEGE?

OOF!

ARE YOU READY FOR NEW AREA? YEAH!

HEY, I DON'T KNOW *EITHER*. IT'S FILLER, JUST *GO* WITH IT.

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IS THERE LIKE A BATHROOM OR SOMETHING? I NEED TO CLEAN UP

YES, BLACK BELT. THERE'S A BATHROOM DOWN THE HALL ON YOUR LEFT

THIS IS AN OUTRAGE!

THANKS, WHITE MAGE. BE BACK SOON.

DID I MENTION THE OUTRAGE?

WE'LL BE HERE WAITING FOR YOU.

SO THAT'S IT THEN?

"OH, LOOKS AS THOUGH I'VE GOT A SPOT OF BLOOD ON ME FROM MERCILESSLY ***BEATING*** SOMEONE TO ***DEATH*** DON'T MIND ME IF I STEP OUT TO HOSE MYSELF DOWN"

JUST LIKE ***THAT***? LIKE IT WAS ***NOTHING***! IT'S SICK!

WHY.. BLACK MAGE, I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE LIKE THIS.

JUST ASSUMED

WELL, I DON'T LIKE TO BRAG...

BUT HERE YOU ARE, GENUINELY ***APPALLED*** BY THE INHUMAN TREATMENT OF YOUR FELLOW MAN. I HAD NO IDEA YOU WERE CAPABLE OF SO MUCH... ***COMPASSION.***

I GUESS I WAS WRONG ABOUT YOU ALL ALONG, BLACK MAGE. CAN YOU EVER FORGIVE ME?

OVER I GO

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

I'M JUST PISSED OFF HE CAN GET AWAY WITH IT SO ***EASILY***!

THIS FLOOR IS FILTHY!

I MEAN, ***GEEZ***! I BET I COULD KILL LIKE ***TEN TIMES*** AS MANY PEOPLE IF I DIDN'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THE LEGAL REPERCUSSIONS. DAMN GUARDS.

AND HERE BLACK BELT IS WITH MONKOPLATIC IMMUNITY AND HE'S JUST ***WASTING*** IT! GIVE ***ME*** THE POWER TO KILL WITH IMPUNITY! I'D PUT IT TO ***DAMN*** GOOD USE

MAN, JUST ***THINKING*** ABOUT IT MAKES ME GIDDY LIKE A LITTLE SCHOOL-MAGE!

WHERE WOULD I ***BEGIN***!

AFTER FIGHTER, OF COURSE

BLACK MAGE IS SO FUNNY! AS IF HE'D EVER HURT ME! I'M HIS ***ONLY*** FRIEND!

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ANYWAY. CAN WE JUST GET ON WITH THE ADVENTURE? GARLAND HAS BEEN DEFEATED

SO NOW WE NEED TO FIND THE PRINCESS AND SAVE HER

OF COURSE, HE WASN'T DEFEATED THE WAY HE'S SUPPOSED TO BE

WELL HERE COMES BLACK BELT NOW

HI GUYS, WHO'S THAT HANDSOME FELLOW?

HELL?

WHAT

HI GUYS, WHO'S THAT HANDSOME FELLOW?

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

WHAT ARE ANY OF YOU TALKING ABOUT?

BLACK BELTS, DID YOU MAKE IT TO THE BATHROOM?

I DON'T BELIEVE IT!

YOU GOT YOURSELF SO LOST THAT TIME AND SPACE FOLDED IN AROUND YOU, THUS CREATING A POCKET UNIVERSE THAT SPAT YOU OUT AGAIN APPROXIMATELY ONE SECOND BEHIND YOURSELF!

IT'S NOT MY FAULT THAT THIS CASTLE IS BUILT OUT OF INSANITY!

IT'S A STRAIGHT LINE! THERE'S NO MAZE!

IT'S NOT MY FAULT THAT THIS CASTLE IS BUILT OUT OF INSANITY!

AAAAAAGH!

SWORD

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WE HAD TOO MANY BLACK BELTS IN HERE BEFORE. LET'S JUST KILL ONE AND GET ON WITH IT.

WHAT WE HAVE HERE CONSTITUTES A *MAJOR* BREAK IN CAUSALITY

WE CAN'T AFFORD TO TAKE SUCH A FLIPPANT ATTITUDE.

IMPACT

PLUS, IT CAN'T BE TOO COMFORTABLE TO HAVE HIS CONSCIOUSNESS SPLIT ACROSS TIME. LIKE THIS.

IT'S NOT

IT'S NOT

I SEE YOUR POINT, WHITE MAGE WE MUST DEAL WITH THIS CHRONOLOGIC CATASTROPHE IN A CALM AND RESPONSIBLE MANNER. THE FATE OF THE *UNIVERSE* RESTS IN OUR HANDS.

NOW TO DISPOSE WITH THE EVIDENCE QUICKLY

OTHERWISE, WHITE MAGE MIGHT FIGURE OUT WHAT I'VE DONE AND LECTURE ME ABOUT TEMPORAL ETHICS

NOW THEN. *YOU* SEEM TO BE THE CLOSEST ONE.

STONE!

BOUNCE!

SO YOU ARE. SO YOU ARE

Y'KNOW, DOWN AT THE SCHOOL OF BLACK MAGERY, WE HAD A SAYING--

YOING!

DAMMIT!

ZOOM!

Now exiting the TEMPLE OF FIENDS. Have a nice day!

THIS DAMN VAT

REALLY? I HADN'T NOTICED. THANKS TO A LITTLE MANIPULATION OF MY STATS

WELL ANYWAY, IT LOOKS LIKE WE FOUND THE BACKYARD OF FIENDS. THIS IS AS GOOD A PLACE AS ANY TO DUMP THE DEW

ARE YOU SURE THAT'S SUCH A GOOD IDEA? I MEAN, WHAT ABOUT THE ECOLOGICAL RAMIFICATIONS OF INTRODUCING THIS FILTH INTO THIS LOCAL HABITAT?

AS IT SO HAPPENS, RM I HAVE A THEORY ON THAT *VERY* SUBJECT CARE TO HEAR IT?

BY ALL MEANS, I *INSIST* THAT YOU ELUCIDATE FURTHER ON THIS SUBJECT

WELL, THE WAY *I* SEE IT, NATURE IS A DELICATE BALANCE OF BIOLOGICAL ENERGY *ORIGINALLY* DERIVED FROM THE SUN.

INTRODUCING *MECHANICAL* ENERGY INTO THAT BALANCE TIPS THE SCALES.

DEVASTATION

THAT'S BAD.

BUT IF WE DO AWAY WITH THE DEW, OUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE MECHANICAL RAPE OF THE LAND ON A *GLOBAL* SCALE IS NEXT TO *NOTHING*.

THIEF I HEREBY PRONOUNCE YOUR THEORY TO BE A +5/+5 THEORY OF ENLIGHTENMENT

WHAT'RE WE WAITING FOR!

AHHH. DO YOU SMELL THAT? THAT HORRIBLE BURNING SMELL? NO, THE SMELL OF NOT HAVING

SORRY, I CAN'T GET PAST THE

OF COURSE, THERE IS A *SMALL* CHANCE THAT EVEN OUR SEEMINGLY NEGLIGIBLE CONTRIBUTION WOULD BE THE FINAL STRAW

MISERABLE

WHAT!

WELL, BLACK BELT, IT LOOKS LIKE OUR JOB HERE IS DONE

YES. AND I'VE GAINED A REVOLUTIONARY NEW INSIGHT INTO THE WORKINGS OF TIME AND SPACE.

MY THEORIES WOULD HAVE REFORMED ALL OF MODERN THOUGHT!

WELL, BLACK MAGE KILLED THE ME FROM ONE SECOND IN THE PAST, SO I'VE RETRO-HISTORICALLY FORGOTTEN *HIS* POINT OF VIEW OF THE EXPERIENCE

SOMETIMES I WONDER WHY I EVEN BOTHER WITH YOU.

NEVER YOU MIND ANYWAY, FIGHTER.

WE MUST NOW GO OUR SEPARATE WAYS.

AWW I WAS HOPING TO TALK ABOUT SWORDS WITH BLACK BELT

I THINK BLACK MAGE AND COMPANY MISS OUT ON THE SUBTLE NUANCES OF SWORD-TALK

A NUNCHUCK GUY

EVEN BETTER! SEE, FOR *YEARS* I'VE BEEN LAMENTING THE LIMITATIONS INHERENT IN SWORD-PLAY, SO ONE DAY I WENT AND HAD THE BEST--

BAMF!

UM.

YEAH THAT WAS ME SORRY GUYS. I THOUGHT THE SMOKE BOMB WOULD LAST LONGER.

NO MORE DISCOUNT NINJA SUPPLY STORE FOR ME.

FAREWELL, BRAVE FIGHTER. I'M SURE OUR PATHS WILL SOON CROSS ONCE MORE

WALK

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SO I'LL JUST WAIT HERE UNTIL BM AND THE OTHERS GET BACK

WE'RE BACK

WELL THAT WAS REMARKABLY QUICK

HEH, I DON'T LIKE TO BRAG NOT THAT THAT'LL STOP ME BUT IT'S A LITTLE THING I LIKE TO CALL "HASTE"

WAIT, SO EVEN HAM HASTE?

SCRIBBLE SCRIBBLE SCRIBBLE

YES, YES WE HAVE.

THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE!

HELL, WE JUST WALKED BACK, THERE WERE NO SPELLS CAST!

HOLD ON NOW AS THE OFFICIAL LEADER OF THE LIGHT WARRIORS...

A POSITION I CERTAINLY DID NOT EARN THROUGH TREACHERY.

I FEEL THAT IT IS MY RESPONSIBILITY TO RESOLVE THIS DISPUTE

THOUGH THE [illegible] RAW [illegible] SOFT [illegible] WE [illegible] TO [illegible] WARRING FACTION ESPECIALLY IF HE HAD ANYTHING RARE AND VALUABLE AND GEM-LIKE TUCKED [illegible] THAT [illegible] OF [illegible] OF HIS [illegible] ESPECIALLY IF THAT [illegible] THING IS WORTH A FORTUNE

AND ESPECIALLY IF HE HAS THAT BOOSTING ITEMS TOO!!

OR HIGH ASS BLADED WEAPONS!!

WHAT'S YOUR DEAL TO DO WITH ANYTHING?

WELL, WE WON'T KNOW UNTIL WE FIND OUT!

IT'S JUST NOT THE RIGHT THING TO DO!

SINCE WHEN WOULD THAT BOTHER YOU?

EVER SINCE I JUST FIGURED OUT THAT HE PROBABLY DIDN'T CARRY A SPELL BOOK.

THAT'SA REALSHAME, GOTTAGO BYE!

BASH

INTERESTING

SHUT!

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ALL RIGHT, WHAT DID YOU MORONS MANAGE TO PILFER FROM GARLAND?

WE'VE FOUND A DILLY OF A PICKLE OF A MYSTERY!

DON'T TALK LIKE THAT. IT SICKENS ME.

MAYBE YOU CAN HELP US SOLVE THIS MYSTERY!

... STOP SAYING THE WORD "MYSTERY."

I AM SO NOT IN THE MOOD FOR THIS.

WALK WALK

COULD ONE OF YOU ROCKET SCIENTISTS TELL ME WHAT GENERAL STUPIDITY HERE IS GOING ON ABOUT?

LOOKS LIKE HE GOT A FEATURE TO ON THE BROADCAST

I BELIEVE I CAN SHED SOME LIGHT ON THIS MYSTERY

CAN WE PLEASE STOP SAYING "MYSTERY" FOR LIKE TEN SECONDS?

HEY, GANG! I JUST FOUND A CLUE. WE'RE CLOSER THAN EVER TO SOLVING THIS MYSTERY!

WHAT'D YOU FIND, RM?

AND DOES IT BACK UP MY INSIGHTFUL INTERGALACTIC GHOST THEORY?

YESTERDAY'S NEWSPAPER!

WE'RE ABOUT TO WITNESS AN INVERSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE NUMBER OF STAB WOUNDS I INFLICT ON YOU AND THE NUMBER OF ANSWERS YOU START GIVING ME.

PLEASE, ALLOW ME TO ENLIGHTEN OUR FELLOW LIGHT WARRIOR, BLACK MAGE.

I MIGHT FINALLY GET SOME USE OUT OF THIS ORATOR SK...

IT'S QUITE SIMPLE. REALLY. FIGHTER, THIEF AND I WERE GOING TO PILLAGE ANY GOODS, VALUABLES, SWORDS, OR STAT-BOOSTING ITEMS FOUND ON GARLAND'S PERSON. SINCE HE WAS A BOSS CHARACTER AFTER ALL, IT'S NOT UNUSUAL TO EXPECT THAT HE MIGHT'VE BEEN HOLDING SOMETHING THAT COULD HAVE PROVEN USEFUL TO OUR QUEST.

HOWEVER, WHAT WE FOUND INSTEAD HAS SHOCKED AND HORRIFIED US TO OUR VERY CORES!

ALL THAT REMAINED OF THE DREAD KNIGHT GARLAND WAS HIS ARMOR! BUM BUM BUMM!

I DON'T HAVE TO SAY BUM BUM BUMM, IT'S IMPLIED

MEANWHILE, DEEP IN THE HEART OF IMP FOREST...

HELP ME.

KEEPEEHEE!

BOOBOOLAND FOOLS! WHAT'S GOING ON?

THE OBVIOUS QUESTION WE ARE PRESENTED WITH HERE IS THE FOLLOWING

WHAT WOULD AN INTERGALACTIC GHOST WANT WITH YESTERDAY'S NEWSPAPER?

INTER... WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

SEE, MY THEORY IS THAT ALIENS FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GALAXY HAVE TRAVELED TO OUR SIDE OF THE GALAXY SO THEY COULD KIDNAP GARLAND AND PERFORM ALL KINDS OF EXPERIMENTS ON HIM TO BETTER UNDERSTAND HOW TO ENSLAVE US ALL!

I'M PRETTY SURE THAT "MR PIBB" AND "DR PEPPER" FIGURE RATHER PROMINENTLY IN THIS SCHEME.

WHAT? IT ALL MAKES SENSE. INTERGALACTIC ALIENS WOULD MAKE THE SIMPLE MISTAKE OF FORGETTING TO PUT A DOT AT THE END OF MISTER AND DOCTOR.

kill...

SO ANYWAY. GOT ANY REAL IDEAS ABOUT THIS?

OOH! A QUARTER!

WELL, GARLAND IS THE VILLAIN AFTER--

DAMMIT!

WHAT!

SO WE'VE STRUCK HIM DOWN ONLY TO MAKE HIM BECOME MORE POWERFUL THAN WE COULD POSSIBLY IMAGINE?!

YAAAAAAAAARGH

SO YOU WERE SAYING?

BASICALLY, SINCE GARLAND SEEMS TO BE THE MAIN VILLAIN, HE HAS CERTAIN ADVANTAGES. AMONGST THESE TRAITS IS A SORT OF NARATOLOGICAL IMPERATIVE. IN ESSENCE, HIS DEFEAT TODAY WAS MEANINGLESS, AS HE'LL JUST APPEAR AGAIN, ONLY MORE POWERFUL THIS NEXT TIME.

SHOULDN'T WE GO AFTER HIM?

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WOW I RAN REALLY FAR

ONE SIDE, RED I'VE GOT SOME LIGHT WARRIORS TO ENCOUNTER

I'VE NEVER SEEN A GROUP OF MORE PATHETIC LOSERS IN ALL MY LIFE

RUSH!

I'M A LIGHT WARRIOR, LADY

WELL THAT WAS EASY

ANYWAY, I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO ASK YOU.

OKAY, BUT I CAN'T GUARANTEE YOU'LL LIKE THE ANSWER.

AND WHY IS THAT?

I COUNTER BLACK MAGE JUST USUALLY GOES INTO A HOMICIDAL RAGE WHEN I SAY STUFF.

ANYWAY, WHY HAS IT TAKEN YOU LIGHT WARRIORS SO LONG TO COMPLETE SO MUCH AS THE SIMPLEST OF TASKS?!

I THINK IT MAINLY HAS TO DO WITH THE GROSS LACK OF SWORDS BY MY [redacted].

I SEE. SO YOU'RE SAYING THERE'S A LACK OF SUITABLE EQUIPMENT THEN?

WHILE WE'RE ON THE SUBJECT, CAN YOU THINK OF ANY OTHER EASILY EXPLOITABLE WEAKNESSES?

YOU MEAN OTHER THAN OUR ALMOST PATHOLOGICAL INABILITY TO TRUST ONE ANOTHER?

OR THE FACT THAT BM, RM, AND THIEF ARE SO BUSY TRYING TO SCREW US ALL OVER THAT WE CAN'T REALLY FUNCTION IN COMBAT?

THEN, YES, I'D SAY OUR EASILY EXPLOITABLE WEAKNESSES ARE THIIIIIIIIIIIIS BIG.

DOES THAT ESTIMATION INCLUDE YOUR OWN STUPIDITY AND GULIBILITY?

HECK NO!

THEN PLEASE GO ON...

SURE! BUT WHAT ARE YOU WRITING DOWN?

*JUST MAKING SOME NOTES ON [AN] UNRELATED [redacted]

WE REALLY OUGHT TO TALK TO MY FRIEND ABOUT THIS STUFF TOO.

THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY. I'M SURE YOU CAN TELL ME EVERYTHING I NEED TO KNOW.

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DUDE, I AM *TELLING* YOU, IT'S NOT GOING TO WORK

HEY, LET HIM DO IT IT'S HIS FUNERAL.

I HOPE

I CAN STILL HEAR YOU.

YOU'RE JUST LUCKY THAT I SEEM TO HAVE MISPLACED MY STABBIN' KNIFE...

THE SHREDDER EMERGING FROM THE OOZE I AM...

MAKING SOMETHING ONE HAS SO BAG

SUPER RED MAGE!

I'D SAY THIS IS EASILY A +4/+4 ARMOR OF KICK ASS.

MO' LIKE A +STUPID/+DUMB ARMOR OF IDIOT

+STUPID/+DUMB HEH, I GOTTA WRITE THAT ONE DOWN CLASSIC!

WHAT!

THAT WAS *FAR* MORE LAME THAN MY "YOUR HP OR YOUR GP" LINE.

UH-OH...

YOU WERE THAT THIEF? I *KNEW* YOU LOOKED FAMILIAR!

LET'S LET BYGONES BE--*AMNESIA DUST IN THE FACE!* HA!

WHAT *IS* THIS, TALCUM POWDER? IT'S ALL OVER MY ROBES. *THANKS.*

THUD!

MEANWHILE, ON THE EDGE OF *CRIMINAL CITY*

AKBAR'S DISCOUNT AMNESIA DUST OUTLET

NOT TALCUM POWDER!

SUCKERS!

I'D BE MORE UPSET, BUT I PAID WITH FAKE MONEY ANYWAY

EVEN SO, IT'S THE PRINCIPLE OF IT

ALMOST GOT IT ALL OUT

DO YOU HEAR THAT?

NOT REALLY

ARMOR TOO HEAVY...

NOT CAGE CRUSHED.

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ANY PLANS FOR WHEN WE GET BACK TO CORNERIA THIS WEEKEND?

I DUNNO. THAT ARACHNA-DUDE MOVIE LOOKS PRETTY COOL.

DON'T YOU MEAN ISPID--

WEB-SWING!

HE *SAID* "ARACHNA-DUDE" LET'S LEAVE IT AT THAT, HM

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THUD

I WISH I HAD ARACHNA-POWERS.

I WOULD DISPENSE DEATH FROM THE SKIES.

WELL *THAT* WAS CERTAINLY UNEXPECTED

NOW, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I'VE GOT TO S.NGLE-HANDEDLY SAVE A FILM GENRE

CAPTAIN PAJAMAS, STICKY-FINGERS. I LEAVE HIM IN YOUR HANDS

IT SHOULDN'T BE DIFFICULT TO FIND EITHER OF THEM, REALLY. THIS IS A RATHER SIMPLISTIC CASTLE, BLACK BELT'S NAVIGATIONAL POWERS NOTWITHSTANDING.

WHAT ARE YOU LAUGHING AT?

NICE HAT-HAIR, PAL.

WELL, AT LEAST I GOT THAT ARMOR OFF

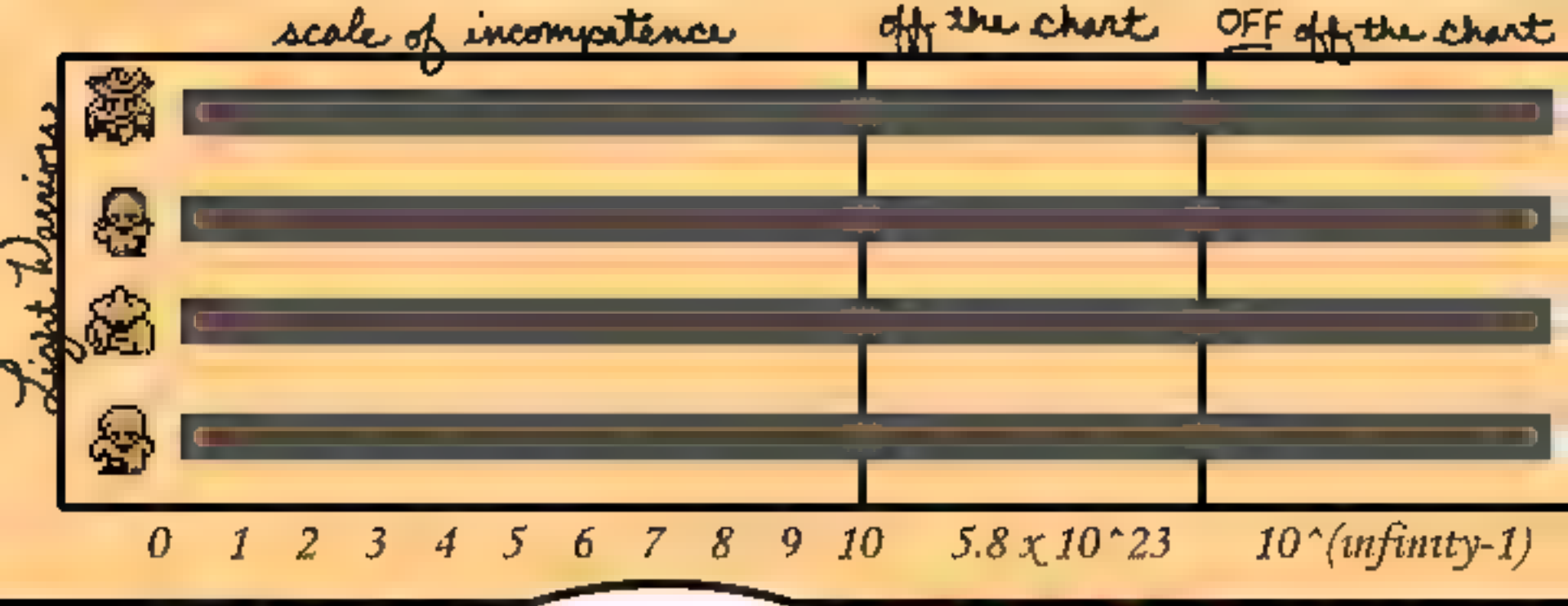
WE OUGHT TO FIND FIGHTER AND THAT PRINCESS AND GET OUT OF HERE ALREADY.

SNORT

SNORT

YOU GUYS TOTALLY SUCK.

REMEMBER, KIDS, WITH GREAT POWER COMES GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO ABUSE THAT POWER.



WELL THAT'S ENOUGH EXPLOITATION I MEAN "INFORMATION" FOR NOW

ARE YOU SURE? 'CAUSE I KNOW ALL KINDS OF TACTICS THAT COULD BE APPLIED AGAINST WHAT FEW STRENGTHS WE ACTUALLY POSSESS.

MUST RESIST. MUST NOT GIVE IN TO TOTAL CORRUPTION. MUST GIVE STUPID LIGHT WARRIORS THE APPEARANCE OF CHANCE...

PRINCESS SARA? ARE YOU OKAY?

JUST RESISTING URGES.

I'D LOVE TO EXPLAIN IT TO YOU, BUT HERE COMES BLACK MAGE!

YEAH, I KNOW HOW THAT IS.

ESPECIALLY AT THIS TIME OF YEAR

HE'S AT THE OTHER END OF THE HALL.

YOU COULD BE EXPLAINING IT RIGHT NOW.

I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS.

OR WHAT IT COULD BE IN REFERENCE TO.

YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW, MA'AM. TRUST ME IT'S MORE STUPID THAN WEIRD

ANYWAY, CAN WE FINALLY GET OUT OF THIS CASTLE?

IT SMELLS OF IMPS.

ER, WELL, Y'SEE... UM

AND NOT IN A GOOD WAY.

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AND SO WITH GARLAND SOUNDLY DEFEATED AND THE LOVELY PRINCESS SARA SOUNDLY SAVED, THE LIGHT WARRIORS FINALLY GOT OUT OF THE SMELLY TEMPLE OF FIENDS.

FINALLY MAN, IT FELT LIKE WE WERE IN THAT CASTLE FOREVER

AND YET IT WOULD SEEM THAT THE SUN HASN'T MOVED AN INCH IN ALL THAT TIME.

WALK WALK WALK WALK

THEY LAUGHED WHEN I SPENT MY PRECIOUS POINTS ON ASTRONOMY, BUT WHO'S LAUGHING NOW!

MUWAHAHAHA!

AHEM. SORRY 'BOUT THAT

SOMETIMES I GO MAD WITH POWER. IT'S ONE OF MY CRAFTY CHARACTER FAULTS.

AND I'M SURE WE'LL NEVER HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT IT KICKING IN AT INOPPORTUNE MOMENTS.

WHAT'RE THE ODDS?

GOOD, OL' RM, BETRAY US? NEVER!

WHAT FOOLS THESE LIGHT WARRIORS BE

NOT TO CRITICIZE OUR FORMATION, BUT AREN'T WE WALKING IN THE EXACT *OPPOSITE* ORDER THAT WE SHOULD BE FOR RANDOM COMBAT?

WALK WALK WALK

I MEAN, FROM A PURELY PRACTICAL STANDPOINT, PUTTING OUR WEAKEST CHARACTERS IN THE VERY FRONT IS THE TACTICAL EQUIVALENT TO ROLLING A BOTCH ON THE CHART TO DETERMINE HOW BAD YOU BOTCHED YOUR TO-HIT-AND-DAMAGE ROLL VS. OFFENSE BLACK MAGE

DAMAGE

EACH TURN

NONE WHEN POINT-DEXTER IS ON GUARD

ANYWAY, THIS IS HOW I SEE IT

IT'S A SHORT WALK, SO WE WON'T RUN INTO A RANDOM ENCOUNTER.

EVEN WHEN POINT-DEXTER IS ON GUARD

EVEN WHEN RANDOM AREN'T THEY, SO HOW OFTEN COULD THEY POSSIBLY HAPPEN? LIKE ONCE EVERY COUPLE OF DAYS AT BEST, RIGHT?

OH GREAT HEAVENLY DM IN THE SKY, WE'RE *SCREWED!*

EVEN WHATEVER POINT-DEXTER... HOW DOES THAT WORK

STEP!

DRAMATIC PAUSE...

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NOOOO!

GEEZ, WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU GUYS?

I'VE BEEN ASKING MYSELF THAT *SAME* QUESTION EVER SINCE I GOT KIDNAPPED

IT'S NOT LIKE I DID ANYTHING DANGEROUS. ALL I DID WAS TAKE ONE LITTLE STEP FORWARD.

SEE? IT'S PERFECTLY HARMLESS.

KINDA LIKE YOU GUYS WILL BE WHEN YOU'RE STABBED TO DEATH. ER, Y'KNOW, FOR EXAMPLE.

WALK

IT'S GONNA CRUSH HIS LITTLE HEART TO LEARN THE TRUTH.

LITERALLY.

A RANDOM ENCOUNTER IS A ONE IN A MI...ION CHANCE.

BESIDES, DO YOU SERIOUSLY THINK THAT MONSTERS CAN JUST APPEAR OUT OF NOWHERE AND ATTACK US?

THERE ISN'T EVEN A *THEMATIC* REASON FOR THEM TO FIGHT US.

STORIES ARE ABOUT CONFLICT SO IF YOU EXPECT RANDOM BATTLES TO OCCUR WITHOUT RHYME OR REASON AND FOR THEM TO THEN HAVE NO IMPACT ON THE STORY, WELL THEN THEY'RE COMPLETELY POINTLESS.

SMASH!

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I LIKES A SPOT O' HONEY IN ME MORNIN' TEA.
ALL THOSE WHO THINK THAT BM HAS BEEN OFFICIALLY BONKED OUT OF COMMISSION, SAY AYE
AYE!
YO!
WHAT-EVER.
I want a Furry Princess doll. Mmmgle.
ANOTHER OF HIS TRADEMARK DARING AND BRILLIANT PLANS
NO PROBLEM, THIEF EXCEPT I M GOING TO NEED SOME TIME TO FULLY ARTICULATE MY LATEST MASTER PLAN OF VICTORY
IN THE MEANTIME, YOU'LL HAVE TO DISTRACT OUR GIANT FRIEND
Snrg chomp with the Snorks!
YOU'RE A THIEF USE YOUR HIGH CHARISMA SCORE TO WOW HIM WITH YOUR WITTY REPARTEE
OF COURSE! IF I CAN SELL ICE TO ICE GIANTS, THEN DISTRACTING THIS BAFOON SHOULD BE CHILD'S PLAY
LET'S SEE, LET'S SEE. GOTTA DISTRACT THIS GIANT FOR A FEW MINUTES... HA! I NEED SOMETHING TROPICAL
SCRATCH
I'VE GOT IT
A PRIEST, A GIANT, AND A GIANT PRIEST WALK INTO A BAR..
THESE SQUISHIES SURE TALK A LOT, BUT NOT FOR LONG...
BLAH BLAH BLAH...
DON'T WORRY, PRINCESS SARA, WE'LL BE RID OF THIS GIANT IN NO TIME RED MAGE'S PLANS ALWAYS WORK OUT
CARRY THE TWO...
WELL, EXCEPT FOR HIS PLAN TO GET US WEAPONS BEFORE OUR QUEST BEGAN, OR HIS PLAN TO KILL THOSE WEREWOLVES IN IMP'S FOREST, OR HIS PLAN TO JUMP GARLAND IN THE QUEST-DUNGEON BEFORE HE COULD KILL US.
OR HIS PLAN TO FREE YOU GUYS FROM THE VAT OF ACID
BUT HOW DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT?
WELL IT'S QUITE SIMPLE-- AMNESIA DUST, HA!
I THINK IT'S JUST TALCUM
AMNESIA DUST!
WHO AM I, UNLESS AM I?
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LOVE, LOVE, LOVE, LOVE! MAKES THE WORLD GO 'ROUND!

JOKES MADE AT THE EXPENSE OF GIANTS MAKE GIANT SAD.

THERE ONLY ROOM FOR ONE GRAMMAR IMPAIRED SAD GIANT!

"GRAMMAR IMPAIRED SAD GIANT"?

WHO THE HELL SAID THAT?

THE SULK!

YOU NO WANT MAKE SULK SAD.

GOD DAMMIT. WE MUST HAVE THE LAMEST SUPER HEROES.

IF SULK LOSE FIGHT, SULK LISTEN TO OLD CURE ALBUMS

I MEAN, SERIOUSLY, WE'VE GOT THE HULK OF ... AGGRAVATOR...

AND THE MEDIOCRE FOUR

BETWEEN THOSE GUYS AND SULK HERE, IT'S NO WONDER WE NEED LIGHT WARRIORS TO SAVE THE WORLD.

FRAGILE MAGE-MAN NO LIKE SULK!

WAAAAAAH!

I AM SUCH A CAD

TSK, TSK. BAD RED MAGE

AWW, POOR SULK.

I FEEL LEFT OUT...

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OKAY, NOW LET ME MAKE SURE I'VE GOT ALL THIS STRAIGHT

WE'RE UP AGAINST A GIANT WHO HAS MANAGED TO TAKE OUT 50% OF OUR TEAM WITH LITTLE EFFORT.

AND NOW YOU AND I HAVE TO BRAINSTORM AN INGENIOUS PLAN OF ATTACK

AHEM. I AM HERE TOO, Y'KNOW. I COULD HELP WITH YOUR LITTLE ATTACK PLAN.

SEEMS LIKE YOU NEED THE HELP REALLY.

PLEASE, PRINCESS SARA. THE LIGHT WARRIORS ARE TALKING NOW.

YOU'D BETTER HOPE TO WHATEVER GOD YOU FOLLOW THAT THIS GIANT KILLS YOU BEFORE I HAVE THE CHANCE TO DO IT MORE PAINFULLY.

DID YOU SAY SOMETHING, PRINCESS SARA?

OH HEAVENS NO.

WHAT COULD I *POSSIBLY* CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR MAN-TALK

OTHER THAN LOGIC, REASON, AND A CLEAR AND DECISIVE PATH TO CERTAIN VICTORY, BUT I'M SURE YOU *NIMRODS* HAVE ENOUGH TESTOSTERONE TO HEADBUTT YOUR WAY THROUGH TO SOMETHING NOT ENTIRELY UNLIKE SUCCESS.

SO. ANY THOUGHTS, FIGHTER?

THAT'S A TRICK QUESTION, RIGHT?

A *TRICK* QUESTION?

I HOPE THIS GIANT HAS THE NAME OF A GOOD DOCTOR A GIANT ONE. 'CAUSE I'M ABOUT TO PUT THE HURT ON.

WE ARE *SO* DOOMED.

THAT'S BRILLIANT! SOMETIMES I THINK YOUR MASSIVE INTELLIGENCE PENALTIES ARE SO IMMENSE THAT THEY FOLD IN UPON THEMSELVES AND TRANSFORM INTO STAT BONUSES!

WELL I DON'T LIKE TO BRAG

NO, WAIT. CHANGE MY TAUNT TO "I HOPE THIS GIANT'S INSURANCE IS ALL PAID UP, 'CAUSE IT'S *THWACKY TIME!*"

"THWACKY TIME"? DO YOU LISTEN TO YOURSELF?

I DIDN'T EVEN SHOW UP IN THIS ONE, AND THEY'RE GOING TO KILL ME OFF AGAIN?! LAAAME.

LOOK AT YOU, SO LOOMING, SO HUGE, SO POWERFUL. YOU THINK YOU'VE WON, DON'T YOU?

ISN'T THAT RIGHT, MR. GIANTY GIANT PERSON?

SOMEHOW YOU MANAGED TO GET THE TWO—ADMITTEDLY *DULL*—BRAIN CELLS TRAPPED IN THAT CAVERNOUS *WASTELAND* YOU CASUALLY REFER TO AS A "SKULL" TO BUMP INTO ONE ANOTHER AND FROM THE FRICTION BORNE OF THAT CHANCE MEETING YOU GOT THE IDEA THAT YOU CAN JUST STOMP AROUND THE OVERWORLD ACCOSTING RANDOM TRAVELERS SUCH AS WE AND DO NASTY, *MONSTROUS* THINGS TO THEM WHICH *WOULD* BE HIGHLY INVENTIVE TREATISES ON THE REALM OF AGONY IF NOT FOR THE FACT THAT YOUR *WOEFULLY* INADEQUATE INTELLECT CAN ONLY SUMMON UP ENOUGH ORIGINALITY AND PURPOSEFULLNESS TO SMASH US WITH YOUR VERY LARGE CLUB.

AND YOU THINK THIS IS JUST FINE?

WELL, YEAH. THE WHOLE POINT OF BEING GIANT IS THAT IT GIVES YOU A SORT OF BIOLOGICAL IMPERATIVE TO SQUISH THINGS OF LESSER GIANTRY, I.E. YOURSELVES.

AH-*HA*! I'M GLAD YOU BROUGHT UP MATTERS OF A BIOLOGICAL NATURE, MY FRIEND *VERY* GLAD

YOU SEE, IT WAS THIS VERY POINT WHICH I HAD HOPED TO ADDRESS IN YOUR COMPANY

IDEALLY, THIS WOULD HAPPEN *BEFORE* YOU SQUISH US.

PREPARE TO BE FLABBERGASTED BY MY STUPENDOUS DEBATING AND PUBLIC SPEECH SKILLS.

SHOULD I HOLD ON TO SOMETHING?

SEEMS TO ME THAT THESE ENVIRONS ARE PREDISPOSED TO NOT SUPPORTING GIANTS.

HOW SO? THIS GROUND'S BIG ENOUGH TO HOLD ME UP. ISN'T IT? WHAT MORE DO YOU WANT?

IT'S NOT A QUESTION OF GROUND-TO-GIANT RATIO, IT'S A QUESTION OF POTENTIAL-FOOD-TO-GIANT RATIO.

I MEAN, *SERIOUSLY*. HOW DO YOU EXPECT A HABITAT INCLINED TOWARDS BEINGS OF *MY* STATURE TO BE ABLE TO SUPPORT A *SINGLE* CREATURE OF YOUR GREAT GIRTH.

IT IS MY CONTENTION, DEAR MR. GIANT, THAT YOU DO NOT ACTUALLY EXIST

MUCH LESS AN ENTIRE *RACE* OF YOU.

HELL, JUST *LOOKING* AT YOU I CAN THINK OF HALF A DOZEN REASONS WHY YOU'RE NOT REALLY THERE

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YOU'RE A WALKING IMPOSS.BLITY THINK ABOUT IT! A BEING OF YOUR SIZE COULDN'T BE BIPEDAL, YOUR SPINE WOULD SNAP LIKE A TWIG!

FOR GODS' SAKE, MAN. WHERE DID YOU FIND ENOUGH MATERIAL FOR YOUR CRUDE LOIN CLOTH?

OR ENOUGH WOOD TO MAKE YOUR ENORMOUS CLUB?

OR ENOUGH LEATHER TO FASHION YOUR SMELLY OL' SHOES.?

ER... THERE WAS A SALE?

DOWN AT GROG'S DISCOUNT. REALLY BIG AND REALLY TALL--

WRONG!

I'LL TELL YOU WHERE YOU GOT IT ALL.

YOU GOT IT FROM **NO**WHERE, *THAT'S* WHERE.

AND DO YOU KNOW WHY? 'CAUSE GIANTS DON'T MAKE SENSE FROM AN EVOLUTIONARY STANDPOINT!

LOUSY EVOLUTION, WHAT YOU DO FOR ME? NUFFIN'!

EXACTLY! YOU NEVER EXISTED IN THE FIRST PLACE, SO EVOLUTION COULDN'T HAVE DONE ANYTHING FOR YOU!

WELL, IF I'M NOT HERE, THEN THIS WON'T HURT YOU!

WAIT! I HAVE A ANOTHER THEORY, YOU'RE A PAC.FIST!

CRUSH!

WELL DARN IT

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HEY! WHY ARE YOU WAY OVER THERE?

IT'S CALLED "PATTERN RECOGNITION" LOOK INTO IT

F.INA..LY.

NOW, GIANT, WE CAN DO THIS ONE OF TWO WAYS. THE EASY WAY..

OR DIE (MWA HA HA!)

GIANT LIKE TO SMASH THE SQUISHIES.

HEY, IT'S YOUR FUNERAL, PAL.

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WHAT DO YOU DO, LITTLE HU-MAN?

WHAT I DO IS GOING TO MAKE YOU WISH YOU WERE SMALLER SO THAT YOU COULD BLEED TO DEATH FASTER.

Urgh...

HAH. BIG WORDS, SMALL HU-MAN.

YES, OUR SIZE-CENTERED QUIPS ARE HILARIOUS, BUT NOW YOU HAVE TO DIE.

EXCUSE ME FIGHTER, BUT I M SURE YOU WON'T BE NEEDING THIS.

I'LL ONLY BE A MOMENT ANY-WAY YOU'LL NEVER KNOW IT WAS GONE

GET A GOOD LOOK AT THIS SWORD, PAL 'CAUSE IT'S THE LAST TIME YOU'LL SEE IT NOT DRENCHED IN YOUR OWN INNARDS.

HIGH STAMINA HELPING CONSCIOUSNESS RETURN. THIRD PERSON NARRATION ALSO HELPS.

SHEEEAH-LALALALA!

DID YOU GUYS SEE THAT?! PRINCESS SAKURA SMOKED SUPERB TECHNIQUE... FIGHTER IN LOVE.

AND I AM CERTAIN THAT THIS BLOODBATH ISN'T AT ALL CHARACTERISTIC OF HER

SHWA!

(THINK CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN DRAGON STYLE POST-ASS KICKIN' POSE?)

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AND SO THE LIGHT WARRIORS CONTINUED TO MAKE THEIR WAY BACK TO CORNERIA.

LOOK, THE POINT *IS* THEY GOT BACK TO CORNERIA. IT DOESN'T MATTER *HOW* THEY DID IT.

SPEAKING OF CORNERIA, LOOKIE THERE!

NOW LOOK CLOSER

CLOSER STILL!

IN THAT WINDOW!

THERE, KING STEVE, THE RULER OF ALL CORNERIA, PATIENTLY AWAITS ANY NEWS ABOUT HIS KIDNAPPED DAUGHTER

SIRE! I BRING NEWS OF PRINCESS SARA'S FATE!

PRAY, GOOD SIR. TELL UNTO ME THAT WHICH YOU KNOW OF MY IMPERILED PROGENY!

OUR SCOUTS AND THE RANGERS HIRED FROM THE ELVEN LANDS HAVE BEEN SCOURING THE COUNTRYSIDE, YET THEY HAVE FOUND NO TRACE OF SARA OR THE LIGHT WARRIORS.

I CAN'T BELIEVE THEY'RE PAYIN' US FOR THIS!

I AM SO DRUNK, MAN.

WOOOO!

I SEE. YOU REALIZE, OF COURSE, THAT AS THE BRINGER OF BAD NEWS, IT IS YOUR CIVIC DUTY TO BE EXECUTED

ER, I WAS NOT AWARE THAT SUCH A TRADITION WAS IN PRACTICE. UH.

OH, I'M KIDDING! JUST A LITTLE REGAL HUMOR FOR YOU THERE. GO ON NOW, OFF WITH YOU.

THANK YOU!

ELITE ROYAL GUARD, HANK

YO.

SEE TO IT THAT THE MESSENGER WHO WAS JUST IN HERE IS DEAD BEFORE HE LEAVES THE CASTLE

YAAAARRR!

DID I REMEMBER TO TELL HANK THAT I WAS JOKING?

HEEEEEEEEELP!

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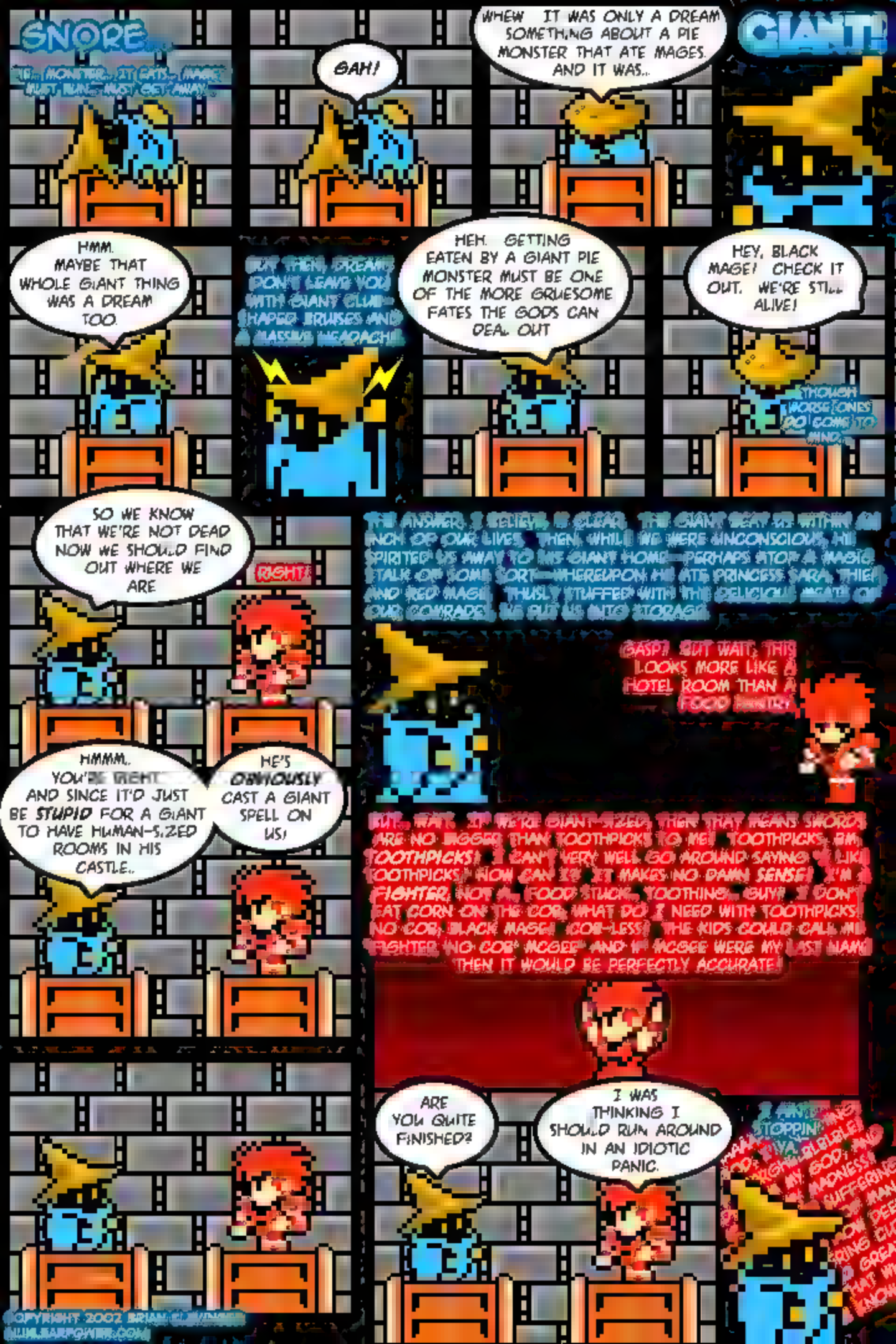
SNORE...
PIE... MONSTER... IT EATS... MAGES! MUST RUN... MUST GET AWAY!
GAH!
WHEW. IT WAS ONLY A DREAM SOMETHING ABOUT A PIE MONSTER THAT ATE MAGES. AND IT WAS..
GIANT!
HMM. MAYBE THAT WHOLE GIANT THING WAS A DREAM TOO.
BUT THEN, DREAMS DON'T LEAVE YOU WITH GIANT CLUB-SHAPED BRUISES AND A MASSIVE HEADACHE!
HEH. GETTING EATEN BY A GIANT PIE MONSTER MUST BE ONE OF THE MORE GRUESOME FATES THE GODS CAN DEAL OUT
HEY, BLACK MAGE! CHECK IT OUT. WE'RE STILL ALIVE!
THOUGH WORSE ONES DO COME TO MIND...
SO WE KNOW THAT WE'RE NOT DEAD NOW WE SHOULD FIND OUT WHERE WE ARE
RIGHT!
THE ANSWER, I BELIEVE, IS CLEAR. THE GIANT DEITY WITHIN ARM'S REACH OF OUR LIVES. THEN, WHILE WE WERE UNCONSCIOUS, HE SPIRITED US AWAY TO HIS GIANT HOME—PERHAPS ATOP A MAGIC BEANSTALK OF SOME SORT—WHEREUPON HE ATE PRINCESS SARA, THIEF AND RED MAGE, THUSLY STUFFED WITH THE DELICIOUS MEATS OF OUR COMRADES, HE PUT US INTO STORAGE.
GASP! BUT WAIT, THIS LOOKS MORE LIKE A HOTEL ROOM THAN A FOOD PANTRY!
HMMM.. YOU'RE RIGHT. AND SINCE IT'D JUST BE STUPID FOR A GIANT TO HAVE HUMAN-SIZED ROOMS IN HIS CASTLE..
HE'S OBVIOUSLY CAST A GIANT SPELL ON US!
BUT... WAIT. IF WE'RE GIANT-SIZED, THEN THAT MEANS SWORDS ARE NO BIGGER THAN TOOTHPICKS TO ME! TOOTHPICKS. BM, TOOTHPICKS! I CAN'T VERY WELL GO AROUND SAYING I LIKE TOOTHPICKS! HOW CAN IT BE? IT MAKES NO DAMN SENSE! I'M A FIGHTER, NOT A FOOD STUCK IN MY TOOTHING... BUT! I DON'T EAT CORN ON THE COB. WHAT DO I NEED WITH TOOTHPICKS? NO COB, BLACK MAGE! COB-LESS! THE KIDS COULD CALL ME FIGHTER, NO COB, MCGEE AND IF MCGEE WERE MY LAST NAME THEN IT WOULD BE PERFECTLY ACCURATE!
ARE YOU QUITE FINISHED?
I WAS THINKING I SHOULD RUN AROUND IN AN IDIOTIC PANIC.
STOPPIN'
MADNESS!
SUFFERING
GREA
KNOW
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HMMM, GIANT BLACK MAGE RAINS DEATH UPON WORLD. I LIKE THE SOUND OF THAT HEADLINE. LET'S SEE THE BLEEDING HEART LIBERAL PRESS COVER THAT UP! WHAT GIANT WAS A FOOL TO GIVE US THE ADVANTAGE OF SCALE!

BLACK MAGE I DON'T THINK WE'RE REALLY GIANTS.

DON'T BE STUPID, OF COURSE WE'RE GIANTS. IT MAKES *PERFECT* SENSE.

WELL, ACCORDING TO THIS, WE'RE IN A GUEST ROOM.

BACK IN CORNERIA

YOU'RE TALKING CRAZY. BACK UP, BRIGHT EYES, I'LL READ THAT.

GUEST ROOM EMERGENCY EXIT PROCEDURE

IN CASE OF FIRE, DO YOUR CIVIC DUTY AND STAY IN YOUR ROOM TO KEEP THE HALLS CLEAR. REMEMBER, ROYALTY AND CHANCELLORS FIRST!

OKAY, SO WE'RE BACK AT THE CASTLE

BUT WHO'S TO SAY THAT WE DIDN'T GAIN GIANT POWER IN THE MEANTIME!

IF MY WOULD THEY HAVE GIANT-SIZED ROOMS AT CORNERIA CASTLE?

AND HOW WOULD THEY HAVE GOTTEN US INSIDE?

AND WHY WOULD

SHUT UP!

I JUST WANT TO CAUSE DEVASTATION ON A GLOBAL SCALE. IS THAT SO WRONG?

YOU WILL... SOMEDAY, BM. I KNOW YOU WILL!

AWWW, HECK. YOU'RE JUST SAYING THAT TO MAKE ME FEEL BETTER.

MEANWHILE, IN THE THRONE ROOM.

WELL DAD, I'M BACK AND I'M NOT DEAD THOUGHT YOU MIGHT LIKE TO KNOW

WHERE'D THAT HAPLESS SUCKER GET OFF TO?

I JUST WANNA GO HOME!

WE GO THROUGH THIS EVERY TIME

LET'S START AT THE BEGINNING. I'M YOUR DAUGHTER, PRINCESS SARA. I WAS KIDNAPPED BY GARLAND..

THIS COMIC IS INFERIOR TO MY EPIC WAR... UH, EPIC.

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SO YOU'RE SAYING THAT I CAN GET RID OF THESE OTHER THIEF SKILLS AND JUST KEEP PICK-POCKETS INSTEAD?

YES!

BUT WHAT IF I WANTED TO STEAL, SAY, THINGS THAT AREN'T IN PEOPLE'S POCKETS?

SEE, THAT'S THE BEAUTY OF IT!

ALL OF THESE SKILLS BECOME DISTILLED IN THE ESSENCE THAT IS PICK POCKETING!

I'M NOT SURE THAT I FOLLOW

IT'S SIMPLE SEE, YOU CAN STILL STEAL ALL THE THINGS YOU LOVE TO STEAL, ONLY NOW YOU'LL DO IT WITH ONE SK...

SAY YOU WANNA ROB THE FIRST BANK OF CORNERIA. WELL, IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT, WHAT'S A BANK VAULT IF NOT A POCKET OF ARCHITECTURAL ORIGIN? WANT TO TELL THE CITY GUARD A CONVINCING LIE? JUST EMPTY THE TRUTH POCKETS OF THEIR MINDS! OPENING A LOCK IS NO PROBLEM AT ALL WHEN YOU CAN STEAL THE LOCK RIGHT OUT OF ITS "POCKET" WITHIN THE DOOR!

THAT HAS *GOT* TO BE ONE OF THE..

DUMBEST IDEAS I'VE *EVER* HEARD

YOU COULD SAVE THE POINTS FROM THE UNUSED SKILLS AND TRADE THEM FOR A *SUPER* LEVEL UP TO BECOME A NINJA.

A *NINJA*, HUH?

MAYBE A *SUPER* NINJA.

TELL ME MORE OF THIS SUPER NINJA OF WHICH YOU SPEAK

WELL, FOR ONE THING, YOU... LOOK *REALLY* COOL--

HEY, MORONS, LET'S GET A MOVE ON BEFORE THE OTHER MORON DOES SOME-THING ESPECIALLY MORONIC.

OH, AND I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING, BUT I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT WE ARE *NOT* GIANTS.

WEEEEE!

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AND THAT'S WHEN YOU HIRED THE "LIGHT WARRIORS" TO GO TO THE TEMPLE OF FIENDS TO RESCUE ME. AND HERE I AM.

DAD I FINISHED TALKING. YOU CAN STOP PRETENDING TO PAY ATTENTION.

WHEW. I'D *NEVER* GET THROUGH THOSE BORING TALKY THINGIES WITHOUT *THAT* CUNNING TACTIC.

YOU MEAN THOSE IMPORTANT MEETINGS TO DISCUSS POLICY, LAW, CURRENT EVENTS, AND SO ON?

CALL THEM WHAT YOU LIKE, STRANGER, BUT IT WON'T MAKE THEM ANY LESS BORING, OR TALKY, OR THINGIES.

DID YOU HEAR *ANY*THING I JUST EXPLAINED TO YOU?

I WONDER WHAT WE'LL GET FOR SAVING THE PRINCESS.

WALK WALK WALK WALK

WELL, IN THAT CASE, I SUPPOSE THE ONLY OPTION AVAILABLE WOULD BE TO REWARD US WITH UNTOLD RICHES!

WALK WALK WALK WALK

WELL, THERE'S SOME HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS FOR THIS SORT OF THING—APPARENTLY HALF OF PRINCESSING IS KIDNAPPING—AND ACCORDING TO TRADITION, WE GET TO MARRY HER.

OR, ACCORDING TO *ANOTHER* TRADITION, THE HEROES GET THEIR OWN PARCELS OF THE KINGDOM TO RULE.

I'M IN NO POSITION TO BE MAKING SUCH AN OFFER

THIEFERIA SCRIPTURE

GRANTED THE REWARD IS

I'M SURE THEY'LL REWARD US FINE. NOW WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT MARRYING PRINCESS SARA...?

DAD, I *REALLY* THINK THEY EXPECT MORE FOR RESCUING ME THAN YOUR STRUMMIN' GUITAR

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WELL DONE, BOYS. PRINCESS SARA TELLS ME THAT YOU, MORE OR LESS, RESCUED HER. I'LL HAVE TO TAKE HER WORD ON THAT

THEN AGAIN, I HAVE TO TAKE HER WORD THAT I HAVE A DAUGHTER NAMED SARA AND THAT SHE IS HER.

OH DAD.

NEVERTHELESS

YESYESYESYESYESYESYESYES!

WELL HAVE I GOT A REWARD FOR YOU!

IT'S GOING TO TAKE ALL THE MONEY IN THE TREASURY TO DO IT, BUT YOU GUYS DESERVE IT!

BRIDGE!

...WE'VE BEEN MEANING TO DO IT FOR AGES, BUT NOW WE'VE GOT A GOOD EXCUSE!

A BRIDGE TO PRONTERA. IT'S ABOUT TIME, REALLY, WE'VE BEEN NEIGHBORS WITH THEM FOR 500 YEARS NOW AND I'VE NEVER DROPPED BY TO SAY HELLO.

WHAT

DAD, YOU HAVEN'T BEEN TO PRONTERA BECAUSE 500 YEARS AGO KING JOE EXILED EVERYONE WHOSE NAME STARTED WITH THE LETTER "P" OR "P-ANS" WITH NOWHERE TO GO, THEY SWAM THE CORNERIAN CHANNEL, WHERE MANY OF THEM DIED, AND THEN FORMED THE KINGDOM OF PRONTERRA. A BRIDGE HAS NEVER BEEN BUILT BECAUSE THEY HATE US AND THEY'D TAKE IT AS AN INSULT TO THOSE WHO DIED IN THAT EXODUS.

OHHHH. SO THAT'S WHERE WE GET THE FAMOUS CORNERIAN CURSE. AHEM: "I HOPE YOU DROWN WHERE YOU'RE A P-AN."

NO, DAD I'M AFRAID THAT THE CURSE YOU'RE THINKING OF HAS A MUCH MORE LITERAL AND MUCH LESS METAPHORICAL HISTORY ATTACHED TO IT

I DON'T GET IT. WHERE WOULD BE EUROPEAN? WAS BORN HERE

OKAY, BUT SERIOUSLY, THAT WHOLE BRIDGE THING WAS JUST A JOKE, RIGHT?

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SO, CAN WE PLEASE STOP TALKING ABOUT THIS STUPID BRIDGE AND GET ON WITH YOU GIVING US THE *REALLY* REAL REWARD?

OH YES, OF *COURSE* NOW THEN, ABOUT THAT BRIDGE I'M BUILDING AS YOUR REWARD

I BELIEVE WHAT OUR ROBED COMPANION IS TRYING TO SAY IS THAT WE WERE THINKING OF A REWARD MORE.. *BEFITTING* THE DEED

YES, YES, OF COURSE YOU WERE, OF COURSE. SO THEN, YOU'D LIKE THE BRIDGE TO BE NAMED AFTER YOU FOUR?

AND THE *OFFICIAL* NAME WOULD BE..?

"KING STEVE'S KICK ASS BRIDGE", *OBVIOUSLY*

I DON'T THINK THAT'S WHAT--

THAT'D BE NO PROBLEM AT ALL!

HOWEVER, YOU UNDERSTAND THAT IT WOULD ONLY BE AN UNOFFICIAL NAME

SO NOW I CAN DO *CRAZY* STUFF LIKE DRILL FOR MANA IN ENDANGERED SPECIES FOREST. WEEEE!

YOU DON'T ACTUALLY *DRILL* FOR MANA.

WE DO NOW!

HOW, IN THE TEN THOUSAND HELLS OF THE GREAT LORD CHAOS, DID A MAN OF YOUR *GROTESQUE* STUPIDITY BECOME THE LEADER OF THE MOST POWERFUL NATION IN THE WORLD?

WELL, MY DAD WAS KING, SO NOW I'M KING.

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AND THUS, KING STEVE'S KICK ASS BRIDGE WAS BUILT

THERE'S ALREADY A WRECK IN THE SOUTHBOUND LANE

AND THEN THE LIGHT WARRIORS LEFT

DO YOU HAVE ELFISH PEOPLE IN YOUR COUNTRY TOO?

BECAUSE THE ALTERNATIVE WAS HELL.

MAN, TRAFFIC IS ALWAYS SO BAD ON THE KING STEVE

SHADDUP!

WELL, IT LOOKS LIKE WE GOT OUT OF CORNERIA JUST IN TIME.

YOU CAN HEAR THEIR SCREAMS FROM HERE...

IT'S A SHAME ABOUT YOU LOSING THEIFERIA THOUGH.

YOU CUNNING BASTARD!

OH, DAD.

WELL, NOW WHAT SHOULD WE DO NOW?

I SAY WE GET TO PRONTERA BEFORE THE WIND CHANGES AND WE HAVE TO SMELL THE BURN VICTIMS

GOOD CALL, BM.

MORBID, BUT A GOOD CALL ALL THE SAME

WALK WALK WALK WALK

AHH, THAT'S WHAT I'M HERE FOR SAGE. VERY DISTURBING LAUGH

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT THIS STUPID PRONTERA ANYWAY?

IT'S THE CAPITAL OF THE RUNE-MIDGART KINGDOM.

WALK WALK WALK WALK

THE CITY HAS A CATHEDRAL, A KNIGHT'S GUILD, AND A PARK. THERE'S THE GREAT ANNUAL ARENA TOURNAMENT THAT ATTRACTS WARRIORS FROM AROUND THE—

OKAY OKAY CAPTAIN TOUR GUIDE I GET IT. SOUNDS LIKE THERE'S A LOT TO DO THERE

OH YEAH, IT'S A LOT OF FUN. IF YOU ENJOY POINTLESS LEVELING UP AND I DO.

WALK WALK WALK WALK

I WROTE PRINCESS SARA A HAIKU OF LOVE. HERE IT IS:

I LIKE SWORDS AND I LIKE SWORDS-CHUCKS, BUT I LIKE YOU VERY VERY MUCH

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WELL, LOOKS LIKE WE'VE MADE IT TO PRONTERA.

THEY MUST SPEND A LOT OF MONEY ON LANDSCAPING. THIS PLACE LOOKS LIKE 32-BIT!

I DUNNO, DON'T THE GODS BELIEVE IN SOMETHING?

YEAH, SCRAPPING PEOPLE WHO ASK QUESTIONS WITH LOW ANSWERS, SO SHUSH!

AHEM. EXCUSE ME, GENTLEMEN.

I HATE THIEF.

I AM BAPHOMET, LORD OF DEMONS! I HAVE COME TO THIS PATHETIC MORTAL PLANE ON BEHALF OF CHAOS. I AM LOOKING FOR THE LIGHT WARRIORS SO THAT I MAY SLAY THEM BEFORE THEY GAIN POWER, TO STAND AGAINST MY MASTER. IT WAS FORETOLD THAT THEY WOULD BE HERE.

OH YEAH, WE'RE THE--MRPH MAHBULAS.

YOU'LL HAVE TO EXCUSE HIM, HE'S AN IDIOT. HE *MEANT* TO SAY IS THAT THE LIGHT WARRIORS ARE HIDING IN *THIS* VERY TOWN.

THEN I MUST BURN THIS CITY TO THE GROUND.

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MY ARMS ARE SLICED OFF AND NOW HE'S GOING AFTER YOU!

ARRRRGH, HE'S STABBING ME!

TSK, WELL I TOLD YOU.

PENNY, PETER, PAUL, PJOE! RUN FOR IT!

WAIT A SECOND, WHAT THE HELL KIND OF NAME IS PJOE? ANYWAY!

I TOLD YOU TO RUN, WHY DIDN'T YOU RU-GHKKKK!

WELL, IT'S QUITE SIMPLE, REALLY

OR RATHER, IT WOULD BE SIMPLE TO ANYONE WITH THE LORE; LOCAL HISTORY OR AREA KNOWLEDGE; CORNGRIAN STATES SKILLS.

OR, IN LIEU OF THOSE SKILLS PER SE, PERHAPS THE JACK OF ALL TRADES MERIT

IT'S BEEN A PRONTERAN TRADITION TO GIVE THEIR CHILDREN P-NAMES SO THEY WOULDN'T FORGET THEIR EXODUS.

PRONTERA WAS FOUNDED BY THE "P-ANS."

BUT AFTER 500 YEARS, I GUESS IT'S JUST A TRADITION THAT PEOPLE FOLLOW WITHOUT THINKING ABOUT IT

LOOK OUT, HE'S USING LASER EYE BEAMS!

BUT WE HAVEN'T INVENTED LASERS YET!

YEAAAURGH!

WE HAVE KILLZAT!

ENOUGH! THIS METHOD OF KILLING WEAKLINGS SACKS IS TOO INEFFICIENT. I MUST DESTROY THIS WRETCHED CITY OF PRONTERA AND ALL WHO DWELL IN IT SO THAT I MAY BE CERTAIN THAT THE LIGHT WARRIORS ARE NO MORE. THEREFORE I SHALL TRANSFORM MY VERY ESSENCE INTO RAW OBLITERATION TO ENSURE VICTORY!

I CAN ONLY HOPE THOSE FOUR WARRIORS OUTSIDE THE CITY GATES WERE TELLING THE TRUTH ELSE MY ULTIMATE SACRIFICE WILL BE FOR NAUGHT!

NOW WOULD BE A GOOD TIME TO RUN FOR OUR LIVES.

AGREED!

KA-BOOM

WELL, THERE WENT PRONTERA.

THOUSANDS OF LIVES LOST IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE.

THERE'LL BE NO EVIDENCE THAT THEIR CITY EVER WAS.

HMM OH YEAH, UH, RIGHT SO..

SUCKS TO BE THEM!

WHAT!

IN ANY CASE, WE'D BETTER BE ON OUR WAY, THE RAINS ARE NIGH UPON US.

THERE OUGHT TO BE A CAVE NORTH OF HERE WHERE WE CAN STAY

RAIN? DEBRIS? CRAZY THOSE CLOUDS AREN'T THE DEBRIS.

PRECISELY, AND WHERE DO YOU THINK ALL THAT AIRBORN DEBRIS, INCLUDING PARTS OF PEOPLE, IS GOING TO BE WHEN IT LANDS?

PERSONALLY, I'D LIKE SOME COVER.

SO WHERE'S THAT CAVE AGAIN?

MEANWHILE, ELSEWHERE IN THE OVERWORLD..

I THINK WE'RE GETTING CLOSER

WHAT TIPPED YOU OFF,?

HAVE TO DEAL BLOOD RAINING FROM THE SKY

BOOK FROM GUNNERWWW.ANGELFIRE.COM

MEANWHILE, WITHIN THE DEEPEST, DARKEST CORNERS OF *IMP FOREST*, A FORCE OF GREAT EVIL WAS EXACTING ITS REVENGE...

HEEEEEEEEELP!

WHAT, YOU DIDN'T *REALLY* THINK I WAS TALKING ABOUT GARLAND, DID YOU? HE'S *PATHETIC*.

DEAR GOD IT BURNS!

DID YOU BUY ME SOME THIN'?

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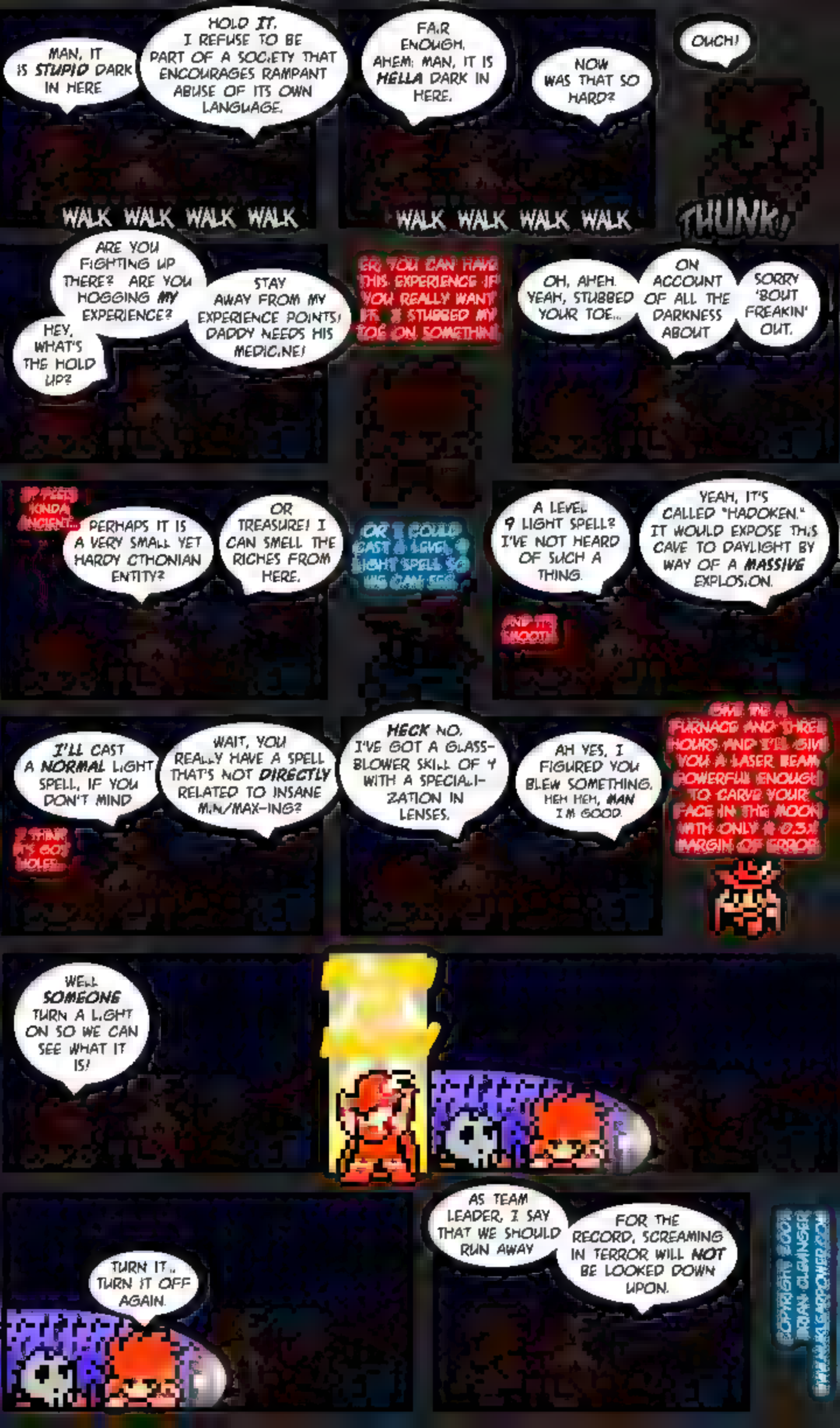
MAN, IT IS STUPID DARK IN HERE
HOLD IT. I REFUSE TO BE PART OF A SOCIETY THAT ENCOURAGES RAMPANT ABUSE OF ITS OWN LANGUAGE.
FAIR ENOUGH. AHEM: MAN, IT IS HELLA DARK IN HERE.
NOW WAS THAT SO HARD?
OUCH!
WALK WALK WALK WALK
WALK WALK WALK WALK
THUNK!
ARE YOU FIGHTING UP THERE? ARE YOU HOGGING MY EXPERIENCE?
STAY AWAY FROM MY EXPERIENCE POINTS! DADDY NEEDS HIS MEDICINE!
HEY, WHAT'S THE HOLD UP?
ER, YOU CAN HAVE THIS EXPERIENCE IF YOU REALLY WANT IT. I STUBBED MY TOE ON SOMETHIN
OH, AHEM. YEAH, STUBBED YOUR TOE...
ON ACCOUNT OF ALL THE DARKNESS ABOUT
SORRY 'BOUT FREAKIN' OUT.
IT FEELS KINDA ANCIENT...
PERHAPS IT IS A VERY SMALL YET HARDY CTHONIAN ENTITY?
OR TREASURE! I CAN SMELL THE RICHES FROM HERE.
OR I COULD CAST A LEVEL 9 LIGHT SPELL SO WE CAN SEE
A LEVEL 9 LIGHT SPELL? I'VE NOT HEARD OF SUCH A THING.
YEAH, IT'S CALLED "HADOKEN." IT WOULD EXPOSE THIS CAVE TO DAYLIGHT BY WAY OF A MASSIVE EXPLOSION.
AND IT'S BIG!!!
I'LL CAST A NORMAL LIGHT SPELL, IF YOU DON'T MIND
I THINK IT'S GOT HOLES...
WAIT, YOU REALLY HAVE A SPELL THAT'S NOT DIRECTLY RELATED TO INSANE MIN/MAX-ING?
HECK NO. I'VE GOT A GLASS-BLOWER SKILL OF 4 WITH A SPECIALIZATION IN LENSES.
AH YES, I FIGURED YOU BLEW SOMETHING. HEH HEH, MAN I'M GOOD.
GIVE ME A FURNACE AND THREE HOURS AND I'LL GIVE YOU A LASER BEAM POWERFUL ENOUGH TO CARVE YOUR FACE IN THE MOON WITH ONLY A 0.3% MARGIN OF ERROR.
WELL SOMEONE TURN A LIGHT ON SO WE CAN SEE WHAT IT IS!
TURN IT... TURN IT OFF AGAIN.
AS TEAM LEADER, I SAY THAT WE SHOULD RUN AWAY
FOR THE RECORD, SCREAMING IN TERROR WILL NOT BE LOOKED DOWN UPON.
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MAN, WHAT THE *HELL* WAS UP WITH THAT CAVE BACK THERE?

I DON'T KNOW. BUT I DIDN'T CON MY WAY INTO THIS LIGHT WARRIOR GIG SO I COULD SPEND MY DAYS RUNNING FROM BLOOD RAIN INTO A PITCH BLACK CAVE FILLED WITH HUMAN SKULLS!

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE, AT LEAST THE BLOOD RAIN STOPPED

WELL, IT *DID*.

NOW WHAT SORT OF CAVE WOULD HAVE HUMAN SKULLS IN IT?

LET'S NOT RETURN TO THIS CAVE EVER AGAIN

IT WILL BE KNOWN TO ALL THE WORLD--BUT MOSTLY JUST US--AS *THE CAVE TO WHICH WE SHALL NOT EVER RETURN!*

NOT RETURN TO THIS CAVE

FIGHTERS NEED SWORD

DENTAL PLAN

EVER

OUT, SALT IN YOUR EYES

CAVE

WHICH WE SHALL

NO

EVER RETURN

GUYS! THIS IS IT! *THIS* IS THE CAVE OF NO RETURN! WE FOUND IT!

WELL, YEAH, THAT'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT THIS WHOLE TIME. WELCOME TO THE CONVERSATION. GLAD YOU COULD MAKE IT.

WE HAVE TO GO BACK THERE!

YEAH, WE'LL GET RIGHT ON THAT.

SO LET'S GET AS FAR FROM THIS CAVE AS HUMANLY POSSIBLE AND NEVER COME BACK

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ON THE BRIGHT SIDE, WE'VE PROBABLY GOTTEN THE GROSSEST PART OF THIS ADVENTURE OVER WITH.

YEAH, I MEAN HOW MANY CAVES CAN THERE POSSIBLY BE THAT INCORPORATE HUMAN SKULLS INTO THEIR DECOR?

MEANWHILE, AT JACK'S DISCOUNT HUMAN SKULLS FACTORY...

Human Skull Sales

Order Invoice:
10,000 units

Bill to:
City and County of Neverwinter

JENKINS, WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO STEP UP PRODUCTION TO MEET THIS NEWEST ORDER. YOU KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS.

HIT THE DOCKS AND TAKE THE HOBO POPULATION DOWN A NOTCH OR TWO

SO. LET'S GET MOVIN', SHALL WE?

FIGHTER WENT BACK INTO THE CAVE.

AND AFTER WE OFFICIALLY DECLARED THAT WE'D *NEVER* GO INTO THAT CAVE AGAIN. THAT'S A SHAME

HE WILL BE MISSED

[illegible] THROAT CANCER

GUESS WE'LL HAVE TO PACK UP AND LEAVE HIM BEH-- *WHY* ARE YOU LOOK-ING AT ME LIKE THAT?

WE *HAVE* TO GO BACK AND GET HIM.

ARE YOU *KIDDING* ME?! DO YOU KNOW WHAT KIND OF FREAK-CAVE IT WOULD HAVE TO BE IF IT'S GOT HUMAN SKULLS LYING AROUND?! THIS IS EXACTLY THE CHANCE THAT [illegible] NO, DEFINITELY JUST ME. ANYWAY, HE'S BONE AND LET'S FACE IT, PROBABLY DEAD BY NOW. LET US NOT WASTE OUR PRECIOUS TIME AND ORGANS ON A FUTILE SEARCH FOR HIS SLAIN BODY.

YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY, "THE CORPSE YOU FIND MAY BE YOUR OWN."

"THEY" DO *NOT* SAY THAT

WELL, MIND YOU IT *IS* HARD TO SPEAK WITH SIX INCHES OF KNIFE STICKING OUT OF YOUR FACE

MOSTLY THEY JUST GURGLE AND BLEED

OH COME ON! WE DON'T REALLY NEED HIM IN OUR PARTY. RED MAGE CAN TAKE POINT.

HM, MY STATS ARE MOST OPTIMIZED IF I'VE GOT SOMEONE IN FRONT OF ME.

OKAY THEN, *THIEF* CAN GO IN FRONT, I DON'T CARE.

ER, MY *HEALTH* IS MOST OPTIMIZED WITH AT LEAST TWO PEOPLE IN FRONT OF ME.

LOOK, WE DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT'S IN THERE, OTHER THAN SKULLS OF COURSE. AND WHERE THERE'S SKULLS, THERE'S CORPSES. AND WHERE THERE'S CORPSES THERE'S BIG GIANT MONSTER... THINGIES. LIKE I DON'T KNOW, DRAGONS. BIG ONES THAT BREATH FIRE AND SHOOT ACID AND DON'T LIKE BEING DISTURBED BY THE LIKES OF US.

THERE'S A LOT OF EXPERIENCE TO BE HAD IN SLAYING A DRAGON. AT OUR CURRENT STATE, WE COULD EASILY LEVEL UP BY DEFEATING ONE IN COMBAT. OR DIE TRYING.

I BELIEVE THAT'S THE EXACT POINT I'M TRYING TO MAKE!

BUT IF WE HAD ONE OF MY BRILLIANT PLANS TO BACK US UP IN THE BATTLE...

YEAH, WE HAVE ACCESS TO RED MAGE'S GREAT TACTICAL .. GEN... IUS..

[illegible] OURSELVES [illegible] DRAGON [illegible] COULD MAKE HIM BY SURPRISE...

OF COURSE WE [illegible] PROBABLY [illegible] OURSELVES IN [illegible] KETCHUP [illegible] ONE KNOWS THAT DRAGONS LOVE KETCHUP. THAT'S WHY YOU HAVE TO GET CLOSE TO KETCHUP [illegible]

[illegible] WE WERE [illegible] WE WERE [illegible] MAN EVER.

SO LIKE BLACK MAGE WAS SAYING, WE'LL LEAVE FIGHTER TO HIS OWN DEVICES. AND DEMISE

FLAT, FIGHTER, WE KNEW YOU TOO WELL. YOU AND YOUR FUGGIN' LAME OBSESSION WITH SWORDS, AND YOUR WIT THAT WAS SHARP ENOUGH TO CUT WARM BUTTER. WHY MUST THE GOOD ONES DIE SO YOUNG? WHILE FIGHTER TORMENTED ME WITH HIS EXISTENCE FOR SO DAMN LONG?! OH, WE DARE NOT IMAGING WHAT CRUEL AND GRUESOME DEATH AWAITS HIM. NO DOUBT HE'LL BE THE CLAWS OF SOME HORRIBLE NIGHTMARE!

ACTUALLY, [illegible] IT RIGHT NOW OH GODS, IT'S HILARIOUS.

HE ACTUALLY THINKS THE ARMOR OF INVINCIBILITY IS *REAL*! BUT THAT'S JUST A HORRIBLE CAVE OF DOOM! I'LL NEVER HAVE TO SEE HIM AGAIN!

OH WAIT, MAYBE IT'S A CAVE TO THE OLD ONES AND THEY RIPPED HIS SOUL OUT THROUGH HIS SPLEEN WHICH, ITSELF, HAD BEEN RIPPED THROUGH HIS CHEST IT'S TOO FUNNY, I HAVE GOT TO SIT DOWN.

WHY, HELLO THERE, BOYS. WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN FRONT OF THE PERFECTLY HARMLESS CAVE THAT I CALL HOME?

COME ON IN, I'VE GOT SNACKS.

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BOY IT SURE IS DARK AND SCARY AND LONELY IN THIS DOOM CAVE
NOW WHAT WAS THAT STORY MASTER VARGUS USED TO TELL ME ABOUT QUESTS TO MAKE THEM LESS SCARY..
WALK
BEWARE THE JABBERWOCK, MY SON!
THE JAWS THAT BITE, THE CLAWS THAT CATCH!
BEWARE THE JUBJUB BIRD, AND SHUN
THE FRUMIOUS BANDERSNATCH!
LANDSOMWHAT!
HE TOOK HIS VORPAL SWORD IN HAND:
LONG TIME THE MANXOME FOE HE SOUGHT
SO RESTED HE BY THE TUMTUM TREE,
AND STOOD AWHILE IN THOUGHT.
"MANXOME"? I'VE HEARD YOU SAY THAT AND I STILL DON'T KNOW HOW THAT'S PRONOUNCED.
Tumtum
COOKIES TASTE GOOD
Vorpal
Manxome ?
AND, AS IN UFFISH THOUGHT HE STOOD
THE JABBERWOCK, WITH EYES OF FLAME,
CAME WHIFFLING THROUGH THE TULGEY WOOD,
AND BURBLED AS IT CAME!
SEE, WHIFFLING I COULD ALMOST BELIEVE, BUT YOU LOST ME WITH "TULGEY".
I GOTS YER "TULGEY WOOD" RIGHT HERE!
OHHH, YEAH!
ONE, TWO! ONE, TWO! AND THROUGH AND THROUGH
THE VORPAL BLADE WENT SNICKER-SNACK!
HE LEFT IT DEAD, AND WITH ITS HEAD
HE WENT GALUMPHING BACK.
AND, HAST THOU SLAIN THE JABBERWOCK?
COME TO MY ARMS, MY BEAMISH BOY!
O FRABJOUS DAY! CALLOOH! CALLAY!
HE CHORTLED IN HIS JOY.
YOU TOTALLY MADE ALL THAT UP! HALF THOSE WORDS AREN'T EVEN REAL!
I'M GOING TO BE SO DISILLUSIONED WHEN I GROW UP THANKS TO THIS. YOU BETTER JUST HOPE THAT I DON'T RECALL THIS MEMORY AT SOME TRAUMATIC MOMENT IN THE FUTURE IN AN ATTEMPT TO CALM MY NERVES WITH A DOSE OF CHILDHOOD NOSTALGIA, MAN. YOU JUST KILLED MY INNERCHILD AND I'M ONLY SIX.
LOUSY DISILLUSIONMENT OF CHILDHOOD MEMORIES.
WHAT YOU DO FOR FIGHTER!
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I'VE GOT CHOCOLATE-PECAN, OATMEAL-RAISIN, AND PEANUT BUTTER AND THEY'RE ALL FRESH, TOO.

YAY!

I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU'VE GOT SOME DOOM COOKIES IN THERE?

WALK WALK WALK WALK

OH HEAVENS NO, THEY TASTE LIKE HELL AND I'M A WITCH, SO I KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.

POISON COOKIES?

UGH! DON'T GET ME WRONG, I LOVE A GOOD POISON PUDDING BUT IT'S ABSOLUTELY DREADFUL IN COOKIE FORM.

WHAT ABOUT SHARP CORNERS? EXPOSED ELECTRICAL OUTLETS? FIRE HAZARDS? RADON IN THE BASEMENT? CANS OF MOUNTAIN DEW?

NOPE, NOTHING LIKE ANY OF THAT IN HERE

AS A COINCIDENCE, THAT ALSO MAKES IT COMPLETELY IDIOT PROOF

MY CAVE IS COMPLETELY CHILDPROOF

CLANG! ARMOR BREAK! SLICE! POWER BREAK! BASH! ARMOR BREAK!

WHAT THE DEVIL IS THAT RACKET?

IF I KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ZODIAC STYLE SWORD PLAY, AND UNFORTUNATELY I DO, THAT RACKET IS THE RAM FORM "BREAKER" MANEUVERS.

THE MAIN TACTIC OF THE RAM FORM OF ZODIACKENSHIDO IS TO BREAK YOUR OPPONENT'S EQUIPMENT WITH YOUR HEAD BEFORE HE BREAKS YOUR HEAD WITH HIS EQUIPMENT.

HA-CHA! TAKE THAT, YE CAVE-BEAST!

BONK!

OUCH.

AH, SO IT'S A SWORD FIGHTING FORM THAT RELIES ON STRIKING AT AN OPPONENT'S WEAK POINTS?

VERY CLEVER.

NOW WHERE DID I PUT THAT LIGHT SPELL...

NOT EXACTLY. IT'S THE "RAM FORM" WHATEVER GENIUS VARGUS MAY HAVE POSSESSED WITH A BLADE, HE WAS NO MATHELETE IN THE REALM OF IMAGINATION.

WAAH!

NEEDLESS TO SAY THAT THERE HAVE BEEN FEW MASTERS OF THE RAM TECHNIQUE.

ARE YOU THE OWNER OR PROPRIETOR OF THIS DOOM CAVE?

YES.

YOUR ROCK-GIANT INFESTATION HAS BEEN TAKEN CARE OF

STAGGER

WOULD YOU PERCHANCE BE REFERRING TO THE EAST WALL OF MY LIVING ROOM?

DARN MY OVERACTIVE IMAGINATION. DARN IT TO HECK.

HOW DID YOU DENT THE WALL?

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SO, DID YOU BOYS ENJOY YOUR COOKIES? HMMM?

OH YEAH!

COOKIE OF DOOM!

NO! TALK! EATING...

THAT'S GOOD! I'M GLAD YOU LIKED MY COOKIES. THE SECRET INGREDIENT IS EVIL.

HOWEVER, I DO HAVE A REQUEST FOR YOU BOYS.

AND BY "REQUEST" I OF COURSE MEAN "DEMAND."

DEMANDS! LADY, I DON'T THINK YOU KNOW, MOR DO I THINK YOU WANT TO KNOW, THE WORLD OF PAIN YOU'RE ABOUT TO PRODUCE!

AND I DON'T THINK YOU WANT TO WALK OUT OF HERE WITHOUT KNOWING WHAT THE ANTIDOTE IS. IT WOULD BE TERRIBLE FOR YOUR HEALTH IF YOU SUDDENLY DIED!

ANTIDOTE TO WHAT? YOU'RE COMPLETELY...

...OUT OF YOUR..

WELL, YOU'VE WON MY GRUDGING RESPECT, WITCH.

I ASSUME YOU HAVE SOMETHING SPECIFIC AND HARROWING IN MIND FOR US.

OR ARE YOU JUST SOME CRAZY OLD LADY LIVING IN A CAVE WHO ENJOYS POISONING HAPPLESS PASSERSBY JUST BECAUSE IT MAKES YOU LAUGH?

QUITE OBSERVANT, THIEF

I DO INDEED HAVE A MISSION FOR YOU BOYS. A QUEST

WHO KNOWS? YOU MIGHT EVEN GET TO WALK AWAY FROM THIS WITH MORE THAN JUST YOUR LIVES.

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I HOPE I HAVEN'T **POISONED** YOUR OPINIONS OF ME!

BECAUSE I'D HATE TO HAVE **POISONED** OUR FUTURE DEALINGS.

BWA HA HAHAHAHA.. OH!

OOH, OOH! GUESS MY FAVORITE '80S BAND GO ON, **GUESS.**

GEE, I DON'T KNOW, COULD IT BE... **POISON?**

NO, IT'S **WARRANT!** BWA HAHAHAHA!

OH GODS, MY WIT IS ABSOLUTELY **POISONOUS!**

A MORE **ACCURATE** STATEMENT I HAVE NOT HEARD IN RECENT MEMORY

OH, I'M SORRY BOYS, REALLY

IT'S JUST THAT I **AM** A WITCH AND, WELL, HONESTLY I DON'T GET MANY HAPLESS PASSERSBY 'ROUND THESE PARTS.

Y'KNOW, WHAT WITH THE GIANTS AND THE WEREWOLVES AND ALL.

I'D GET IT MYSELF, YOU UNDERSTAND, BUT I'M COMPLETELY **BLIND** WITHOUT ME.

I'LL SAVE YOU FROM THE GRUESOME DETAILS, BUT SUFFICE IT TO SAY THAT WHEN A DEMON COMMENTS THAT HE'D LIKE TO SEE THINGS THROUGH YOUR EYES, HE'S NOT SPEAKING **METAPHORICALLY.**

ANYWAY, ASSUMING THAT YOU DON'T DIE FROM THE TEAMING MONSTER HORDES OR THE POISON I'VE GIVEN YOU, I'LL REWARD YOU FOR YOUR TROUBLE.

BUT SERIOUSLY I'VE POISONED YOU FOR A REASON.

WELL **THAT'S** GOOD TO KNOW

I NEED YOU BOYS TO GO OUT INTO THE HORRIBLE WORLD AND FIND MY CRYSTAL BALL.

I'M SORRY TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR TROUBLES, MA'AM, BUT WE'RE ON A REALLY IMPORTANT MISSION TO SAVE--

YEEARGH!

SHUT UP! WE'RE GOING TO GET--

--QUEST XP! IT'S LIKE LEVELING UP FOR FREE!

--MONEY! IT'S LIKE STEALING FOR FREE!

IF YOU MAY TO ASK WHY MY KNIFE IS ALSO IN HIS BACK, THEN YOU'RE NOT PAYING ATTENTION.

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SO, IF YOU BOYS RETURN WITH MY CRYSTAL BALL, THEN I'LL GIVE YOU THE ANTIDOTE TO THE POISON AND 100 GIL EACH. WHAT DO YA SAY?

GIA-GUINE

100 GIL EACH. YOU SAY?

ACT I

I'M BLIND, NOT STUPID

WELL, AS ACTING LEADER OF THE LIGHT WARRIORS, AND OUT OF ABJECT FEAR OF BECOMING A POISONED FROG MAGE, I ACCEPT YOUR QUEST

OF COURSE. AS SOON AS WE GET THE ANTIDOTE YOUR LIFE WILL INSTANTLY BECOME FORFEIT

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WELL, I GUESS WE OUGHTA GET GOIN' Y'KNOW BEFORE THE POISON KICKS IN AND WE DIE

WAIT!

TSK YOU DON'T HAVE TO YELL

OH GREAT AND POWERFUL MATOYA! I BESEECH YOU.

OH MY! I HAVEN'T BEEN BESOUGHT SINCE THE '70S!

TELL UNTO ME THAT WHICH IS THE LOCATION OF THE MOST FABLED ARMOR OF INVINCIBILITY WITHIN THY CAVE!

FIGHTER MUST BE AS DUMB AS RED MAGE IS STUPID

HEY!

I JUST CALLS 'EM LIKES I SEES 'EM.

ANYWAY, THAT MORON STILL THINKS THE--

OH, THAT OLD THING? IT'S RIGHT OVER HERE COLLECTING DUST IN THE CORNER. WHY? DO YOU ASK?

I'VE BEEN WANTING TO GET RID OF THAT CLUNKY OLD THING FOR YEARS NOW. BUT IT'S SO HEAVY WITH INVINCIBILITY THAT I CAN'T EVEN BUDGE IT

WELL, I COULD TAKE IT OFF YOUR HANDS IF YOU REALLY DON'T WANT IT

IF YOU COULD SEE BLACK MAGE'S FACE, WELL, YOU'D GO NSANE BUT JUST BEFORE THAT, YOU'D SEE THAT HIS MOUTH IS HANGING WIDE OPEN

HERE IT IS, THE LEGENDARY ARMOIRE OF INVINCIBILITY!

WHAT, YOU MEAN INSIDE YOUR CABINETS THERE?

WHAT I HAD IN MIND... BUT INVINCIBILITY WORKS IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS... URGH

IT'D BE SAD IF IT WEREN'T SO PAINFUL FOR HIM. THEREFORE I LAUGH. TEE HEE!

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IT'S SO NICE OF YOU BOYS TO GET RID OF THAT HEAVY ARMOIRE FOR ME.

I ALMOST FEEL SORRY FOR POISONING YOU INTO MY SUB-QUEST I'M *THIS* CLOSE TO REGRET

THANKS

PERHAPS YOU COULD GIVE US SOME CLUES AS TO THE POSS.BLE WHEREABOUTS OF YOUR CRYSTAL BALL?

AFTER ALL, IT *IS* IN YOUR OWN BEST INTEREST TO HELP US FIND IT BEFORE YOUR POISON FIN.SHES ITS WORK.

OH, OF COURSE. SIKKI THE PIRATE STOLE IT ON HIS WAY TO TAKE OVER THE PORT TOWN OF PRAVOKA. IT HAS A PORT, YKNOW, FOR BOATS. AND HE IS A PIRATE AFTERALL, PILLAGING TOWNS AND STEALING FROM OLD LADIES IS WHAT HE DOES, SO I DON'T BLAME HIM FOR IT.

WAIT A SECOND!

YOU KNOW *EXACTLY* WHO TOOK YOUR CRYSTAL AND *EXACTLY* WHERE HE IS AND YOU'RE NOT EVEN MAD AT HIM FOR IT, YET *WE'RE* THE ONES WHO ARE POISONED AND HAVE TO GO GET IT BACK?!

I SUPPOSE IT *DOES* SEEM STRANGE THAT I WOULD SIMPLY SIT HERE AND WAIT FOR THE OFF CHANCE THAT SOMETHING WOULD HAPPEN BY SO THAT I COULD MAKE THEM GO GET MY CRYSTAL.

BUT, THEN IT WOULDN'T BE A SIDEQUEST, NOW WOULD IT.

SHE'S GOT A POINT

WHAT THE--NO SHE *DOESN'T!*

A FROG IS NOT THE MOST HORRIBLE THING ONE CAN BE MAGICALLY TRANSFORMED INTO. I CAN DEMONSTRATE IF YOU WISH.

SEE, NOW *THAT* IS A GOOD POINT

WE'LL SEE YOU ONCE WE RETURN FROM PRAVOKA WITH YOUR MAGIC CRYSTAL SEEING.. EYE.. THING.

SUCH NICE YOUNG MEN.

IT SURE IS NICE TO FINALLY GET THAT DARNED ARMOIRE OUT OF HERE.

IT'LL REALLY OPEN UP THE LIVING ROOM.

STILL, IT SEEMS STRANGE THAT A FIGHTER WOULD BE SO EAGER TO GET HIS HANDS ON A PIECE OF FURNITURE

EVEN IF IT *IS* INVINCIBLE FURNITURE

HMM. UPON FURTHER REFLECTION, I REALLY HOPE THAT HE WASN'T ASKING FOR MY *ARMOR OF INVINCIBILITY*. DARN MY POOR OLD LADY HEARING. OH WELL, I'M SURE HE'D TELL ME IF THERE HAD BEEN A MISUNDERSTANDING

MOVE IT, SLOWY MCSLOW!

MY INVINCIBILITY IS KILLING ME

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OH YE GODS, WE ARE PATHETIC.

WALK WALK WALK

HOW SO? WE'VE BEEN HIRED TO BE LIGHT WARRIORS AND WE'RE QUESTING TO SAVE THE WORLD, AND RIGHT NOW WE'RE ON OUR [illegible] SIDEQUEST!

YEAH, THIS WHOLE SIDEQUEST GIG IS GREAT, LET ME TELL YA.

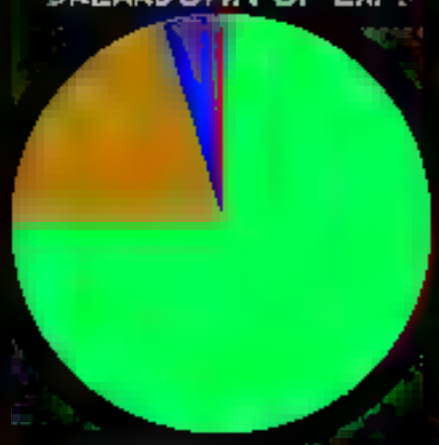
I THINK MY FAVORITE THING ABOUT IT IS THE PART WHERE WE'RE ALL POISONED!

WALK WALK WALK

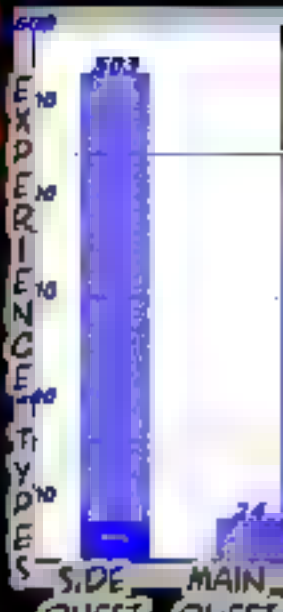
B.M., IT'S ALMOST LIKE YOU HAVE NO UNDERSTANDING OF ADVENTURING AT ALL.

WALK WALK WALK

BREAKDOWN OF EXP.



WITHOUT SIDEQUESTS, YOU'RE NOT ON AN ADVENTURE, YOU'RE JUST A ROAMING BAND OF THUGS WHO BRING TERROR AND DEATH TO AN OTHERWISE INNOCENT AND PEACEFUL WORLD. THE NOBLE SIDEQUEST IS WHAT SEPERATES US FROM THE MONSTERS. LIFE IS A SIDE-QUEST! SEIZE THE EXP!



YES, BUT... YOUR FACE IS STUPID!

ALAS, IT IS THE SECRET PRIVATE AGONY OF ALL WHO MIN/MAX... WE BEAR THE BURDEN OF A LOW CHARISMA SCORE!

[illegible] YOUR HOLINESS AIN'T A PRIVATE PAIN IF YOU'RE HURTIN' EVERYBODY!

MAN, I'M SO DAMN FUNNY!

WALK WALK WALK

WELL, IF WE'RE DONE MAKING FUN OF ME--

FOR NOW.

--I'D LIKE TO SAY THAT FIGHTER APPEARS TO HAVE MASTERED HIS ARMOIRE

WALK WALK WALK

OH YEAH, CARRYING THIS THING IS A BREEZE NOW THAT I'M FULLY SUPPORTING ITS WEIGHT WITH ONLY MY SPINE.

BUT ISN'T THAT PAINFUL?

YOU HAVE NO IDEA.

WALK WALK WALK

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YOU GUYS HEAR SOMETHIN' CREEPY?

WHAT, YOU MEAN THOSE DISGUSTING NOISES COMING FROM THE UNIDENTIFIABLE ORIFICES OF THE FREAK-BEING UP AHEAD?

DUN DUN DUNNN!

SPLURT!

OOWICH!

YEARGRRRRLE!

I TOLD YOU, YOU DON'T HAVE TO SAY "DUN DUN DUNN"

THIS MAY BE A STUPID QUESTION, BUT...

WHICH WAY IS IT FACING?

IS IT LOOKING AT US?

I THINK THAT'S AN EYE...

NO, THAT'S AN EYE. *THAT* THING'S... I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT THING IS.

SPOOT!

SO... I GUESS I CAN'T HOLD MUCH LONGER!

LOOK, THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT WE'RE GETTING A CHANCE AT A PRE-EMPTIVE STRIKE. LET'S KI... IT NOW.

MAYBE... I DON'T KNOW ANY MORE IT LOOKS LIKE THAT EYE HAS *TEETH*.

MIGHTY MUSCLES... GIVING OUT...

GACK!

BUT WHAT IF IT'S A ONE OF A KIND CREATURE?

THEN WE'LL BE DOING THE UNIVERSE A FAVOR.

POINTER... MAKE IT BLEED! OR IF IT DOESN'T DO THAT, AT LEAST MAKE IT OOZ!

QUIVER SHAKE WEAK

KLONG!

THAT'S A SHAME

HELP... ME...

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WELL. IT'S UP TO US, NOW.

YOU DON'T SERIOUSLY WANT TO FIGHT THAT THING, DO YOU?

WE MIGHT HAVE TO, Y'KNOW, TOUCH IT.

FIGHTER CAN'T BREATHE

NEED AIR TO LIVE

SPAK!

WE COULD JUST HIDE HERE BEHIND THE ARMOIRE UNTIL IT WADDLES AWAY

I'M OKAY WITH THAT

DON'T YOU THINK WE SHOULD HELP FIGHTER? HE APPEARS TO BE IN PAIN.

I'M OKAY WITH THAT

OR A COMPLETELY UNRELATED NOTE, I WONDER WHEN THEY WILL TURN BACK TO NORMAL

BOI!!

BECAUSE THE MONSTER OVER THERE IS REALLY GROSS AND WE DON'T WANT TO TOUCH IT. NOW SHUT UP BEFORE IT NOTICES US AND GET OFF ME BEFORE YOU START GOING THROUGH MY POCKETS

KER-THUD

"I GOT BETTER." BUT WHY ARE YOU WHISPERING?

"WE THOUGHT YOU WAS A TOAD"

WHAT'RE YOU SO WORRIED ABOUT? YOU'VE ONLY GOT SOME MOLDY SPELL COMPONENTS AND OLD GUM WRAPPERS THERE

HOW DO YOU DOOO?

BLEHH!

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I AIN'T TOUCHIN' IT.

ME NEITHER

NO CHANCE

YOU DON'T HAVE TO TOUCH IT TO ZAP IT WITH MAGIC

I'D HAVE TO LOOK AT IT, AND THAT'S JUST AS BAD.

MEANWHILE, NOT TOO FAR AWAY...

OH FOR THE LOVE OF— WE'LL NEVER SAVE THE WORLD AT THIS RATE

WHAT? YOU CAN'T TELL ME THAT THE CREEP IS TOO [illegible] TO CAST A SPELL AND

[illegible] WANT TO BLAST BACK TO THE [illegible] YOU DO IT

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THAT IT LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE GOING TO TAKE ACTION!

MAYBE I WILL...

OKAY, I WILL...

FINE YOU DO THAT

GOOD

HEY, AT LEAST THEY'RE NOT ATTACKING EACH OTHER NOW!

I THINK THAT'S A SIGN OF SOME REAL PROGRESS.

JUST SNEAK OVER THERE AND "TAKE CARE" OF THAT THING SO THEY CAN GET BACK TO THE MISSION.

RIGHT!

WELL, OBVIOUSLY!

BOINK!

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HEH. THEY'RE TOO BUSY BICKERING TO NOTICE ME.

THEY'LL *NEVER* SUSPECT A THING.

F.INE!

F.INE!

F.INE!

F.INE!

TIME TO TAKE OUT THE TRASH!

F.INE!

F.INE!

F.INE!

F.INE!

SKAP!

YAR!

YOU'RE STUPID

NO, YOU'RE STUPID

NO, YOU'RE STUPID

YOU'RE STUPID

SGHLORP!

WHAT THE HELL? WAS THAT NOISE?

I THINK IT WAS BLACK BELT

BLACK BELT, EH? THAT MEANS *WHITE MAGE* IS NEAR!

WANNA GO BACK TO MY PLACE AND PERUSE MY SCROLLS?

DAMMIT, EVEN IN MY IMAGINATION SHE'S TOO GOOD FOR MY SLIGHTLY MORE UNDER LINGS

DO YOU GUYS HEAR... I'M NOT SURE. IT SOUNDS SORT OF LIKE WHIMPERING AND PLEADING AND BEGGING, ONLY MUFFLED.

HELP.. PLEASE HELP

I CAN'T BELIEVE HE'S TRYING TO RIP ITS INNARDS OUT!

I KNOW! ITS DISGUSTING EXTERIOR IS *NO-THING* TO HIM, SO HE DOVE IN IT!

YOU CAN STILL HEAR IT CRY

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BY RYAN'S HEADBAND

CAN'T THAT IDIOT DO ANYTHING RIGHT?

SPAP!

WELL, NOW THAT BLACK BELT'S HERE, IT'S JUST A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THAT HIDEOUS BEAST-MONSTER IS TAKEN CARE OF MEANWHILE, WE *SHOULD* HELP FIGHTER

BAM!

WHAT THE--WHO'RE *YOU*?

I'M THE VOICE INSIDE YOUR HEAD THAT TELLS YOU WHAT TO DO

YOU MEAN HUNGER?

HOW LONG DO YOU THINK HE'S JUST GOING TO STAND THERE LOOKING AT HIS SHOES?

I SAY FIVE MINUTES TOPS.

NO, YOU MORON, I'M ONE OF THOSE VOICES THAT TELLS YOU WHAT TO DO AT IMPORTANT FORK-IN-THE-ROAD MOMENTS!

I'M GOING WITH TEN.

WANNA MAKE A BET?

YOU'RE ON!

IF YOU'RE NOT HUNGER, THEN WHY AM I CRAVING CHEESEBURGERS NOW?

STOP THINKING ABOUT FOOD! DECISION OF EPIC HARDCORE LOOMS OVER YOU AT THIS VERY MOMENT!

C'MON BIG TEN! NO FIVER, NO FIVER!

THIEFY NEEDS A NEW PAIR OF ELF SHOES!

GORPDROOGLE!

DON'T MIND TELLING YOU, THIS THING REALLY HURTS!

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ALL RIGHT, SO WHAT'S THIS B.G IMPORTANT MORAL THING.E ANYWAY?

FIGHTER IS TRAPPED UNDER HIS MORONIC ARMOR OF INVINCIBILITY. HIS LIFE REST.S IN YOUR HANDS. THERE ARE BUT TWO OPTIONS OPEN TO YOU.

SOUNDS REASONABLE ENOUGH.

I SIMPLY ADVOCATE THAT YOU SIMPLY LET HIM ROT UNDER THE THING'S MASSIVE WEIGHT. MAYBE SHOW SOME

AH-HA! SO YOU'RE MY EVIL SIDE.

KEEP YOUR

SO WHERE'S MY GOOD SIDE THEN?

WELL, THE THING ABOUT THAT IS— Y'KNOW, IT'S ALL RELATIVE

MEANING?

MEANING ICONICALLY I AM YOUR GOOD SIDE BECAUSE THAT GUY IS YOUR ATROCIOUS EVIL SIDE.

DESTROY THEM!

YOU ARE MAGIC! YOU ARE CHANGE! YOU ARE THE CATALYST OF ALL DESTRUCTION! LIFE IS DEATH. DEATH IS LIFE!

MANIFEST YOUR WILL UPON THE TAPESTRY OF CREATION! END IT NOW!

WHOAH. THAT GUY IS HARDCORE.

I'M THE LESSER OF TWO EVILS

NO, I DON'T THINK I WI...

I'M JUST SAYING YOU COULD THOUGH

SO LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT

MY CHOICES ARE "LET FIGHTER DIE" OR "LET FIGHTER DIE AND DESTROY ALL OF REALITY IN THE MEANTIME."

NO IT!

GO TEN, GO TEN, GO!

I'M MORE OF A GOHAN GUY

WHAT?

ER, GO FIVE. YAY!

DO IT!

THAT'S A TOUGH CHOICE.

WHY AREN'T YOU DOING IT YET!

WE GO SLEEP. GOMPPOMIS

FOUR MINUTES, TWENTY SECONDS. GETTIN' NERVOUS?
NOPE. YOU?
ME NEITHER.
YOU SHOULD BE
YOU SHOULD BE
I CAN'T FEEL MY ARMS.
SQUAK
SO WHY DON'T YOU SETTLE THIS INSIPID BET AND START BEING HEROES FOR ONCE!
WELL HE'S NOT, AND HE COULD REALLY USE YOUR HELP!
SO WHAT'S THE COMPROMISE, GUYS? I AM TIRED OF THIS INNER-MONOLOGUE
THE MAIN PROBLEM, WM, IS THAT THE CURSED MONSTER IS JUST WAY TOO GROSS FOR US TO GET WITHIN ATTACKING RANGE OF IT
BESIDES, ACCORDING TO A VERY RELIABLE SOURCE, CREEPS ARE VULNERABLE TO FIRE MAGIC. I'VE ONLY GOT ICE AND YOU USE WHITE MAGIC
DO IT!
DO IT.
MAYBE, JUST MAYBE, IF WE ALL WORK TOGETHER, WE CAN DEFEAT THIS CREEPIN CREEPY CREEP
AWESOME. IT'S BEEN WAY MORE THAN FIVE MINUTES.
I WON THE BET
YUP IT'S A SHAME YOU DIDN'T BOTHER TO SAY WHAT WE WERE BETTING. YOU WIN NOTHING.
WHAT? OH HE WHAT NOW?
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OKAY GUYS. IF WE WORK TOGETHER, WE CAN BEAT TH.S THING.

FIRST, WE'LL HAVE FIGHTER... ER, WHERE *IS* FIGHTER?

ER, HEM, WELL...

HEH HEH HEH...

LOOKIT ME DANCIN' ON TOP OF FIGHTER'S GRAVE!

C'MON, EVERYBODY! DO THE BLACK MAGE!

'SPECIALLY *YOU*, WHITE MAGE!

GET DOWN FROM THERE AT ONCE!

WE'VE GOT TO GET FIGHTER OUT FROM UNDER THAT THING! HE COULD SUFFO-CATE DOWN THERE!

DANCING MACHINE ON THE VIDEO SCREEN DANCIN' LIKE YOU AIN'T NEVER SEEN!

I THINK SHE'S SHAKING WITH UNHINGED RAGE.

PERHAPS WE SHOULD LEAP OUT OF THE WAY

TOSS YOUR HANDS IN THE AIR LIKE YA JUST DON'T CARE. THAT FIGHTER'S DEAD HEH HEH. WHAT A WILLEPREDICT #1?

NOOOOO!

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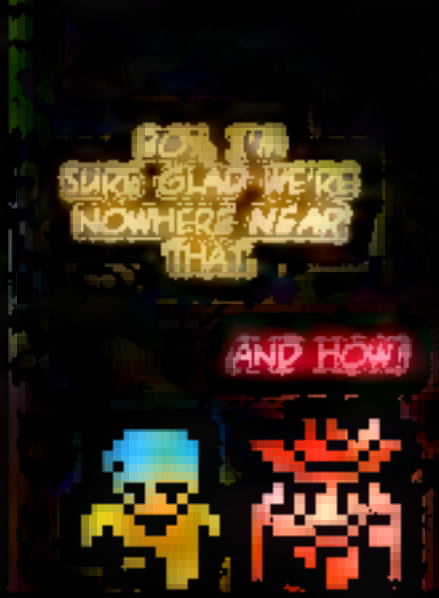

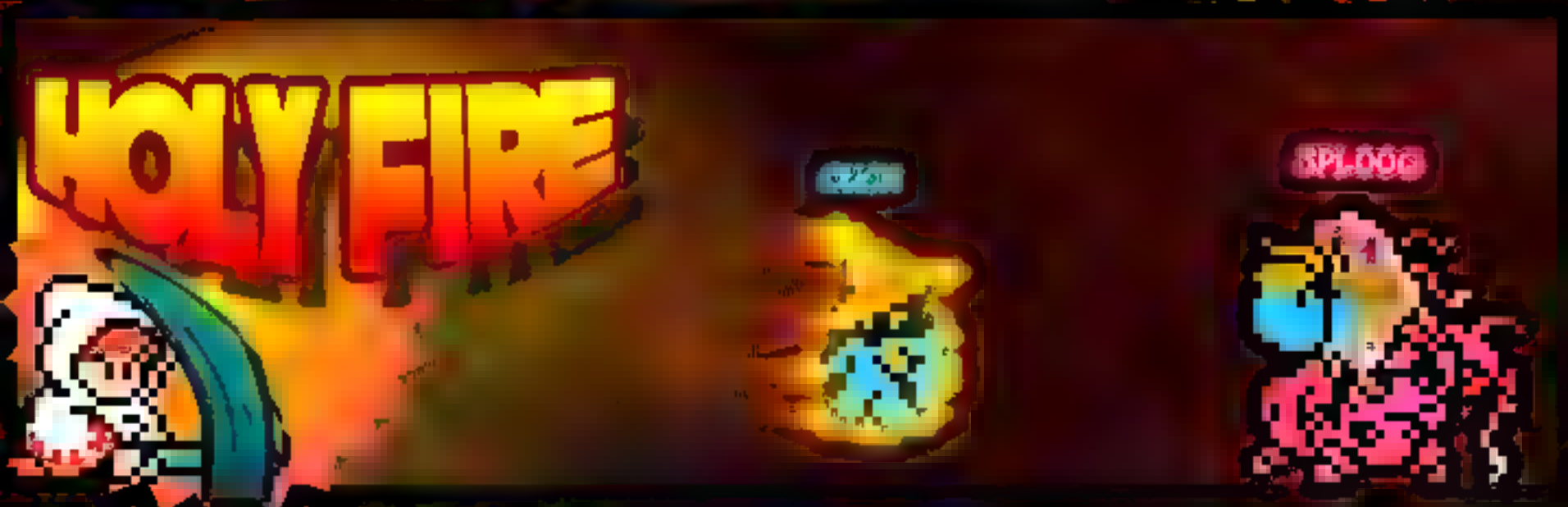

The Creep

When ye attacke the monstyr Creep with thyne spells of fyre, yea, viktory shall be unto thee post haste But only do so at a considerable distence.

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BRRRT!!!

ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE FOREST TREES BROKE OUR FALL

WHY DID YOU HAVE TO SAY THAT?

WELL, HOW ELSE WERE WE SUPPOSED TO GET DOWN?

WAIT A SECOND HAS ANYONE SEEN FIGHTER?

AHHHH!!

LOOK, HE'S DOWN THERE!

UP! HE'S UP THERE! WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU!

WHAP!

URGH... I... I THINK I'M GOING TO BE OKAY

YOU KNOW WHAT THE BEST PART IS?

I WANTED IT TO HAPPEN AND THEN IT DID!

CRUNCH!

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"LET'S RIDE WITH THE TOP DOWN," YOU SAID.
"WE'LL FEEL THE ROAR OF THE WIND IN OUR HAIR," YOU SAID
WELL WHAT ABOUT THE LASER BEAMS BLASTING THROUGH OUR BRAINS!
IT SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA AT THE TIME.
IKARUGA

I KNOW HOW WE CAN FREE FIGHTER FROM HIS ARMOIRE PRISON! BEHOLD!

QUANTUM FLUCTUATION OF SPACE

$g = \text{Measure of Geometry} + \delta g \leftarrow \text{Random fluctuation}$

Quantum Principle $\rightarrow \delta g \approx \frac{L^n}{\Delta L^4}$ $L^n \approx 10^{-33}$ cm

δg $\Delta L \gg L^n$ $\delta g \approx \frac{L^n}{\Delta L^4}$

Quantum =

I WILL SIMPLY TRANSFER ALL OF MY STAT POINTS INTO MY INT RATING, INVENT AND MASTER QUANTUM MECHANICS, AND THEN CONSTRUCT A DEVICE THAT WILL REDESCRIBE THE ARMOIRE'S WEIGHT ON A QUANTUM LEVEL SO WE CAN MOVE IT OFF OF FIGHTER!

THE EXPERIENCE GAINED FROM SUCH A WELL THOUGHT OUT PLAN WOULD BE ASTRONOMICAL!

IT'S ALMOST TOO EASY

YET ANOTHER WORK OF GEN.US, RED MAGE

YOU'RE A TRUE ASSET TO OUR CAUSE

DARN THAT UNCERTAINTY PRINCIPLE!

IT ALWAYS GETS ME LOST

I WOULD LIKE TO INTERJECT SOME CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM IN REGARDS TO THE ALLEGED PLAN OF YOURS, BUT

BY ALL MEANS!

THIS PLAN, MUCH LIKE ALL YOUR OTHER ONES, IS UNNECESSARILY COMPLEX UNTO IMPOSSIBILITY

FIRST, AND I MEAN THIS IN ALL SINCERITY, YOU ARE AN IDIOT

IN CONCLUSION, YOUR INTELLECT IS LACKING AND YOUR PERSONAL HYGIENE IS POOR

I MEAN, HELL, WE COULD PROBABLY JUST TIP THE DAMN THING OVER AND FIGHTER WOULD BE

SMACK!

WELL THAT WAS EASY

ALAS, QUANTUM MECHANICS PLAN ALPHA, THE DAY WAS NOT OURS.

TA-DA! ER, SORRY 'BOUT THAT HIT BLACK MAGE.

I DIDN'T NEED ALL THOSE TEETH ANY-WAY

YA MISSED ONE

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WAIT, WAIT, WAIT. HOW'D YOU GET IN THERE ANYWAY?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

THAT'S WHAT I MEAN! I MEAN A BIG HEAVY DAMN CHUNK OF FURNITURE FELL FROM A GREAT HEIGHT ONTO YOUR CAVERNOUS SKULL!

EXACTLY!

SO HOW DID YOU GET INSIDE IT, *AND*, MORE TO THE POINT, WHY AREN'T YOU DEAD!

WELL OF COURSE I'M NOT *DEAD*

DON'T YOU WATCH CARTOONS, BM?

THIS SORT OF THING HAPPENS ALL THE TIME.

YOU REALIZE THAT DOESN'T ACTUALLY *ANSWER* THE QUESTION.

OH, BUT I THINK IT DOES.

OKAY, BUT IT REALLY DOESN'T!

YES IT DOES!

AWW CRUD!

CARTOONS

EXACTLY! PLUS, THE BOTTOM OF IT WAS MADE OUT OF CHEAP PARTICLE BOARD

YOU DEPRESS ME.

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THEN SUDDENLY, AND WITHOUT ANY WARNING EITHER, RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THEIR REALLY WITTY BANTER.

I LIKE STATS.

I LIKE EVI

I SUPPOSE WE SHOULD SET UP CAMP FOR THE NIGHT

NIGHT FELL.

I HATE THIS JOKE

GOOD IDEA, WHITE MAGE. WE'LL NEED TO SET UP A BASE CAMP. I THINK THIS CLEARING WILL BE A GOOD SPOT FOR A TOWN HALL. BLACK BELT, YOU'RE USED TO CHOPPING UP WOOD, SO YOU GET TO WORK HARVESTING LUMBER FROM THE NEIGHBORING FOREST. THIEF, YOU'RE INTO COLLECTING GOLD, SO YOU CAN HIT THE NEIGHBORING GOLD MINE—THOUGH I SUSPECT DOING SO WILL ARTIFICIALLY CREATE A HIGH UPKEEP SITUATION. I'M SURE HIS THIEVERY SPEED WILL MAKE UP FOR IT.

THIEF, YOU'VE TALKED TO RED MAGE MORE THAN THE REST OF US. WHAT THE *HELL* IS HE DOING?!

IT'S LIKE HE'S IN ANOTHER WORLD.

YOU MAY BE MORE RIGHT THAN YOU KNOW, BLACK BELT

WHITE MAGE, BLACK MAGE, AND FIGHTER, I WANT YOU THREE TO TEAM UP ON A BARRACKS TO THE SOUTH.

SO HE TALKS EVEN STRANGER THAN NORMAL.

BUT I WONDER WHAT IT IS LIKE TO EXPERIENCE CONSCIOUSNESS SPLIT BETWEEN PLANES OF INTERACTIVITY

RED MAGE INSANITY VISION IMPLEMENTED

DEFEND THE MIGHTY BARRACKS!

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WE FINALLY GOT THE TENT UP

HEH. TENT? DON'T YOU MEAN THE "BARRACKS"?

NO, I'M PRETTY SURE IT'S JUST A TENT

A BARRACKS WOULD PROBABLY BE A MUCH LARGER, MORE PERMANENT STRUCTURE

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE!

NOT AGAIN

WELL, WE FINISHED THE "BUILDING" YOUR *ALLEGED* BARRACKS.

THAT WAS YESTERDAY. WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME TODAY?!

YESTERDAY: HE WAS IDLE FOR FIVE MINUTES

YOU'VE BEEN IDLE FOR *FIVE* MINUTES?! DO YOU HAVE ANY *IDEA* HOW FAR BEHIND THAT PUTS US?!

THIS SAND TASTES LIKE DIRT

APPARENTLY NOT, NO.

WE'RE DEFENSELESS! WE COULD BE WIPED OUT BY A HORDE OF ORCS OR A LEGION OF UNDEAD!

OR TERROR OF TERRORS, A LEGION OF HORDES OF UNDEAD ORCS!

AND IT'LL BE *YOUR* FAULT! SO WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

WE...

[redacted]

WHY DO I HAVE TO FACE THE OTHER WAY FOR YOU TO EXPLAIN THE PLAN?

TRUST ME.

IT'S SO GOOD TO SEE THEM GETTING ALONG.

ISN'T IT?

ER...

TWENTY MINUTES LATER.

SO WHY DID WE HAVE TO SET UP THIS OTHER TENT?

THE FIRST ONE GOT... NOT GOOD

NINETEEN MINUTES AGO

DOOT DOOT DOOT, HEY WHITE MAGE!

OH YEAH, THAT THING THE MAGIC WON CLEANS

SIXTEEN MINUTES AGO.

STUPID WHITE MAGE MAKIN' ME DO STUFF I DON'T WANNA

...SO THAT CAN'T BE WHY WE HAD TO PUT UP THIS TENT

LOOK! THE POINT IS IS THAT WE HAD TO GET A SECOND TENT UP.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT WHO PROPOSITIONED WHO FOR HOT MAGE LOVE.

TEN MINUTES AGO.

NOT EVEN IF IT'S THE CURE FOR CANCER

THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT!

ONLY ONE WAY, BABY!

WELL, I GUESS WE OUGHTA TELL WHITE MAGE THAT HER TENT IS FINISHED AND THEN RETIRE TO OURS.

THAT'S A GREAT IDEA IF YOU CAN IGNORE THE FACT THAT OUR TENT STILL REEKS OF INDUSTRIAL STRENGTH CLEANERS.

WE COULD TELL A STORY TO PASS THE TIME UNTIL YOUR TENT DE-STINKIFIES. IT'S A FUN GROUP ACTIVITY

YOU GET A GROUP TOGETHER AND EACH PERSON MAKES UP A PART OF THE STORY

WE USED TO DO IT ALL THE TIME AT MY TEMPLE

WOULD THAT BE BEFORE OR AFTER THE NIGHTLY LINGERIE PILLOW FIGHT?

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HA!

HMMMM!

YAAA!

THAT'S QUITE A RIGOROUS PRACTICE SESSION BLACK BELT

PRACTICE, SHMACTICE. THERE'S A GNAT BUZZING NEAR MY EARS. I *HATE* THAT

AH. AND HERE I THOUGHT YOU WERE BUSY HONING YOUR MIND AND BODY INTO PERFECT HARMONY

WHAT? WHY WOULD I DO THAT?

EH. WELL, I THOUGHT THAT'S WHAT MARTIAL ARTISTS DID. YOU FORSAKE HELPER WEAPONS AND CONSTANTLY STRIVE TO UNLOCK HIGH-MYSTICAL POWERS

WELL NOW *THAT'S* CERTAINLY AN INTERESTING APPROACH.

BACK AT *MY* DOJO THEY JUST TAUGHT US TO BEAT OUR OPPONENTS SENSELESS.

THE PREVAILING THEORY OF THE SCHOOL WAS THAT AN OPPONENT WHO WAS TOO BROKEN TO MOVE WAS AN OPPONENT WHO

THAT'S *LIKE* ANCIENT WISDOM OF THE ORIENT.

I GUESS.

SO IS BEING ABLE TO BREAK A MAN'S LIMBS IN SIX PLACES BEFORE HE HITS THE GROUND *HA!*

TELL ME, YOU DON'T HAPPEN TO HAVE ANY SORT OF HEIGHTENED SENSES, DO YOU?

HM, SO YOU ARE A BRUTALLY EFFICIENT HAND TO HAND FIGHTER.

THE KIND WHERE YOU WOULD KNOW IF SOMEONE WAS SNEAKING UP ON YOU FROM THE SHADOWS

HM? NO REASON. ANYWAY, WHITE MAGE WANTS US ALL BACK AT THE CAMP FOR SOME SORT OF GROUP ACTIVITY THING.

BB, WEAK AGAINST

'KAY WHAT'RE YOU WRITING?

NOTHING. NOW GO HAVE SOME AMNESIA DUST

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NOW THAT EVERYONE'S HERE AND BROUGHT BACK FROM THE BRINK OF STABBITY DEATH...

...WE CAN BEGIN. FIGHTER, WHY DON'T YOU START?

THANKS!

OH GOODY!

OH BOY

IMAGINE, IF YOU CAN, AN EPIC WORLD WHEREIN HEROES DWELL, AND GOOD THING TOO 'CAUSE, MAN, IS THERE EVER EVIL AFOOT IN THIS LAND. IT'S NOT EVEN SAFE TO GO TO THE SWORD SHOP! YOU KNOW THESE HEROES. THEY ARE...

THE DEFIANT KNIGHT...

THE ARCANE MASTER...

THE TRICKSTER ROGUE...

THE CUNNING CAVALIER...

THE CARING HEALER...

AND THE BRAWN WARRIOR.

THEY MUST BAND TOGETHER AND RID THE WORLD OF AN EVIL SCOURGE! ONE THAT THREATENS TO DESTROY AND CORRUPT ALL THAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED BY THE KINGDOMS OF MAN!

I'M THE EVIL SCOURGE! I'M A DRAGON. YAR!

AND THEN...

THEN, WITH THE HELP OF SOME BASIC NECROMANCY SPELLS, HE FASHIONED THEIR CHARRED REMAINS INTO AN UNDEAD SUIT OF ARMOR THAT WOULD PROMPTLY FOR HIM ON HIS QUEST STRAIGHT TO THE EVIL SCOURGE! DRAGON WHERE HE'D THEN DELIVER THE CORPSES, DEMAND CONTROL OVER HALF THE WORLD, AND TRICK THE DRAGON INTO STEPPING ONTO THAT HALF SO HE COULD THEN POSSESS THE DRAGON'S GREAT POWERS AND REIGN IN A NEW ERA OF DARKNESS AND SUFFERING. STAY TUNE

YEAH, RIGHT. SO THEN THE WIZARD GUY, WHO WAS THE MOST POWERFUL AND BEST LOOKING WIZARD IN ALL CREATION AND DIDN'T HAVE ANY KIND OF HYGIENE PROBLEMS, GOT TIRED OF BEING HELD BACK BY THE INCOMPETENCE OF HIS STUPID AND VERY UGLY COMPATRIOTS.

I KNOW!

SO ONE NIGHT, MIGHT TOGETHER, HE CAST A LOW LEVEL FIRE SPELL INSIDE THE LUNGS OF THE OTHER ADVENTURERS, INSTANTLY SUFFOCATING AND COOKING THEM FROM THE INSIDE WHILE THEY SLEPT.

THE END. SLEEP WELL, GUYS!

CAN'T YOU DO ANY-THING NOT EVIL!

THE CAVE

I COULD TRY. SOMETIMES I THINK THAT MAYBE FOR THE RIGHT WOMAN I COULD DO IT. YOU KNOW, THE KIND OF WOMAN THAT WOULD MAKE ME NOT EVIL. BUT THEN I THINK THAT SHE'D PROBABLY WANT TO TALK TO ME AFTERWARDS, AND WHO WANTS TO PUT UP WITH THAT?

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THANKS FOR STANDING GUARD AT THE ENTRANCE, BLACK BELT

NO PROBLEM. THAT'S WHAT I'M HERE FOR.

I JUST *KNOW* THAT LITTLE IDIOT WILL TRY SOMETHING AND I'M NOT IN THE MOOD FOR IT

IT DOES SEEM THAT WAY SOMETIMES, DOESN'T IT.

WHAT WITH THE RAMPANT EVIL AND THE INCLINATION TOWARD BRUTAL VIOLENCE.

AND THE OTHERS AREN'T EXACTLY AS... HEROIC AS ONE WOULD EXPECT

FIGHTER SEEMS NICE, BUT HE'S A COMPLETE IDIOT

THIEF WOULD SOONER STEAL FROM CHARITY THAN LIFT A FINGER TO SAVE THE WORLD.

AND RED MAGE IS AS BAD AS THIEF IN HIS WAYS.

MEANWHILE.

I HATE MY LIFE

THESE BURNT FRIES ARE COMIN' OUT OF YOUR CHECK, MR. NINJA!

I SUPPOSE WE MUST ACCEPT THAT FATE WORKS IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS.

AND I *DO* THANK YOU, BLACK BELT

YOU ARE OBLIGATED TO BE MY BODYGUARD, AND NOTHING MORE, YET YOU HAVE BEEN A TRUE FRIEND TO ME

YOUR COMPANY IS PERHAPS ALL THAT HAS KEPT ME SANE.

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I...

I'M SORRY, WHERE WAS I, BLACK BELT?

YOU THANKING VERY MUCH BRACK BELT-SAN!

SHE'S *TOTALLY* FA...ING FOR IT!

I KNOW I WILL REGRET IT, BUT NEVERTHE-LESS, I MUST LOOK.

ME SO HONGRY! FIND DOG FOR SOUP!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

WHAT MADE YOU THINK THIS WAS A GOOD IDEA?

FOR THE GODS' SAKES, YOU'VE STILL GOT YOUR MAGE HAT ON!

DID YOU THINK I WOULDN'T NOTICE?!

AND WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH BLACK BELT?

YOU WANT *HOW MUCH* FOR A PAIR OF ROBES?

I'LL NEVER PAY!

OH BUT I THINK YOU WILL.

OHHH. ME SO SORRY!

ARE THERE NO DEPTHS THAT YOU WON'T SINK TO?

WE WON'T KNOW 'TILL WE GET THERE!

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HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO TAKE BLACK BELT OUT?

YOU'LL GIVE ME THE SECRET TO DEFEATING BLACK BELT FOR JUST HALF OF MY SHARE OF THE TREASURE WE'LL FIND ON OUR QUEST?

SIGN ME UP!

AND JUST **WHERE** DID YOU GET THE ***INANE*** IDEA THAT YOU COULD DISGUISE YOURSELF AS HIM?!

YOU'LL GIVE ME THE SECRET TO WINNING WHITE MAGE'S HEART FOR JUST HALF OF FIGHTER'S SHARE OF THE TREASURE WE'LL FIND?

DONE AND DOUBLE DONE.

JUST SIGN ON THE DOTTED LINE, THE ONE UNDER IT, AND THE ONE UNDER THAT ONE.

DONE.

AND INITIAL IT AT THE BOTTOM. AND THEN THE TOP IN THAT ORDER.

NOT A PROBLEM.

AND THEN FORGE FIGHTER'S SIGNATURE

BEAT YA TO IT.

FEEL NECESSARY TO INFORM YOU THAT THE CONTRACT GIVES ME THE RIGHTS TO THE ***BOTTOM*** HALVES OF YOUR TREASURE!

TOP, BOTTOM, WHAT DO I CARE?

WELL, IT'S JUST THAT..

I'D HAVE TO GO THROUGH THE TOP HALVES TO GET TO THE BOTTOM HALVES AND I DO HAPPEN TO HAVE FIRST RIGHTS TO ANY TREASURE I SEE SO I'LL ACQUIRE YOUR LEFT OVER HALVES ON THE WAY TO MY HALVES

WHAT'D YOU SAY? I DIDN'T QUITE CATCH IT

JUST SPEAKING IN ***FINEPRINTESE*** DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT

LOOK, THE POINT IS THAT I'M HERE, IT'S NIGHT TIME, AND WE'RE IN YOUR TENT SO LET'S GET WACKY

WACKY WITH LOVE, THAT IS!

NO.

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THIEF AND I NEED TO HAVE A SERIOUS DISCUSSION ABOUT THE QUALITY OF HIS SUCK-ASS PRODUCTS.

JUDGING BY YOUR SLANDEROUS REMARKS, I ASSUME THAT YOU'D LIKE TO HAVE THE RIGHTS TO YOUR SHARE OF OUR TREASURES BACK, HM?

YA DARNED TOOTIN'

NOT ONLY DID YOUR PLAN FOR ME TO WIN WHITE MAGE'S HEART FAIL, BUT IT FAILED MISERABLY! SHE HATES ME NOW! WHICH, ACCORDING TO MY RADAR, IS THE OPPOSITE OF HOW SHE USED TO FEEL ABOUT ME!

THE POINT IS THAT I AM NOT SATISFIED WITH THE PRODUCT OR SERVICE YOU PROVIDED ME. THEREFORE, I AM EXERCISING MY RIGHT AS A CONSUMER TO RETURN YOUR WARES FOR MY MONEY. IT'S ALL IN THE CONTRACT YOU MADE ME SIGN, SO GIMME.

OH I THINK NOT. TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THAT CONTRACT.

NOW LOOK CLOSER. CLOSER. CLOSER STILL...

WHAT, YOU MEAN THIS PART HERE?

AHEM: "SATISFACTION GUARANTEED, OR YOUR TREASURE BACK"?

SEE THAT HARMLESS DOT OF INK BETWEEN SATISFACTION AND GUARANTEED?

YES. NOW REALLY CONCENTRATE ON THAT LINE.

BARELY... WHAT THE—!

YOU MAGNIFICENT BASTARD!

CTION GUAR

I INTENDED IT. THE CANCER WHICH I OWN CONSUMES YOU. I'M A CRACKER. THAT FOR READING IT.

I HATE YOU.

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ALL WAS WELL IN THE LIGHT WARRIOR CAMP THAT NIGHT.

GOSH, I SURE DO HOPE THOSE HAPLESS PASSERSBY ARE ABLE TO GET MY CRYSTAL BALL BACK SO I CAN SEE AGAIN.

THIS WHOLE BLINDNESS THING IS A REAL DRAG.

I CAN'T EVEN TELL WHAT KIND OF POISON I GAVE THEM, OR HOW MUCH I USED

UNTIL...

OH WELL. IF THEY *ARE* THE LIGHT WARRIORS AFTER ALL THEN I GUESS THEY'LL SURVIVE ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.

THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT REALLY. THE POISON WAS DILUTED IN A WHOLE BATCH OF COOKIES SO THEY OUGHT TO BE FINE REGARDLESS.

UNLESS OF COURSE I SOMEHOW MANAGED TO GIVE THEM MY *NIGHTBANE* POISON, KNOWN AS THE MOST POWERFUL, EVEN *DEADLY*, HALLUCINOGENIC COMPOUND IN THE ENTIRE WORLD, IN WHICH CASE, MAY *WRETCHED* SOULS

NIGHTBANE

ENDLESS NOCTURNAL TORMENT- GUARANTEED!

MY! WHAT A WONDERFUL NIGHT'S SLEEP!

THERE'S NOTHING QUITE LIKE SLEEPING UNDER THE STARS.

UNDER THE TENT TARP.

OH, AND I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR KEEPING WATCH.

THINK NOTHING OF IT, WHITE MAGE. IT'S PART OF THE JOB

HM, IT LOOKS LIKE WE'RE THE FIRST ONES UP THIS MORNING

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THAT. LOOK, THE LIGHT WARRIORS' TENT IS EMPTY!

DO YOU THINK THEY DITCHED US?

NOT LIKELY, THE ARMOIRE IS STILL HERE I DOUBT FIGHTER WOULD LEAVE IT

ELSEWHERE.

LET US NEVER SPEAK OF THIS AGAIN.

AGREED.

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SPRITE COMICS ARE SO LAME.

YES, I AGREE. I HATES ME THEM SPRITE COMICS

I REALLY HATE HOW THEY JUST REUSE THEIR IMAGES.

YOU MEAN HOW THEY JUST REUSE IMAGES FROM GAMES.

OR HOW THEY JUST COPY AND PASTE THE SAME PANEL OVER AND OVER IN AN DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO FILL SPACE?

BOTH.

I ALSO DISLIKE THE SAD ATTEMPTS AT SELF-REFERENTIAL HUMOR.

IT'S EVEN WORSE WHEN THEY REFERENCE THEIR SELF REFERENTIAL HUMOR.

IT'S LIKE POST MODERN IRONY, BUT REALLY DUMB.

GOOD THING WE DON'T DO THAT

YUP!

SO... NOW WHAT?

CLICHÉ WACKINESS

NOOOOOOOO!

NOT ANOTHER WACKY MONTAGE!

I'M MR. T! AND I'M IN A SPRITE COMIC! IT'S FUNNY 'CAUSE IT'S NOT WHAT YOU WOULD EXPECT! I PITY DA FOO' WHAT DON'T THINK THIS IS HILARIOUS.

I AM PIE! PIE IS WACKY— ESPECIALLY WITH LEGS! IF I WEREN'T ME, I'D BE EATIN' ME RIGHT NOW! WACKY!

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THOUGH IT IS AN HONOR TO JOIN YOU ON YOUR MOST HOLY QUEST TO SAVE THE ENTIRE WORLD...

WELL, I SUPPOSE THIS IS GOOD BYE, LIGHT WARRIOR.

WE CAN'T AFFORD TO MEDDLE DIRECTLY IN YOUR AFFAIRS.

BUT TOO OUR ALWAYS MEDDLE IN OUR AFFAIRS

BLACK BELT DEFEATS THE CREEP AND LOOKS IMPORTANT

BARLAND

AND DON'T FORGET THE TIME WHEN WHITE MAGE HEALED ME FROM THE BRINK OF DEATH AFTER THE DIFFICULTY WITH MY PLAN TO DEFEAT THE WEREWOLVES

IN EFFECT WHITE MAGE HELPED TO DEFINE US ALL

WOW I NEVER THOUGHT OF IT LIKE THAT BEFORE.

BLACK BELT AND WHITE MAGE ARE ALWAYS HELPING US OUT OF A JAM.

THEY'RE OUR OWN GUARDIAN ANGELS.

THAT IS AN INTERESTING POINT, WHITE MAGE.

IT SEEMS THAT WE ARE THE ONES DOING ALL THE FOOT WORK

WELL ANYWAY, I COME FROM A VERY *UNIQUE* SCHOOL OF NON-INTERFERENCE. SEE, WHAT YOU DO IS... ER.

BLINK

I WAS TALKING TO YOU BY THE WAY

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AND SO.

OH FOR THE LOVE OF EVIL, NOT THIS AGAIN.

WALK WALK WALK

I'M SORRY YOU FEEL THAT WAY, FELLAS BUT I'VE BEEN QUESTING FOR THE ARMOIRE OF INVINCIBILITY ALL MY LIFE

I'M NOT ABOUT TO GIVE IT UP NOW.

WALK WALK WALK

YOU ARE *OBVIOUSLY* MISTAKEN. I WOULDN'T BE LUGGING AROUND THIS IMPOSSIBLY HEAVY FURNITURE IF I HADN'T BEEN QUESTING FOR IT

AS TEAM LEADER, I HAVE TO SAY I DON'T APPROVE

AGREED THE ARMOIRE'S MASSIVE ENCUMBERANCE RATING IS FAST BECOMING A MAJOR HINDRANCE TO OUR HEROIC TRAVELS.

HOLD IT!

I MEAN, GEEZ, I'M NOT STUPID

IT'S FURNITURE NOT ARMOR. IT DOES NOT PROTECT YOU

WHERE, OH WHERE TO BEGIN. OH, I KNOW!

FIRST, WE'VE ONLY BEEN ON THIS "QUEST" OF YOURS FOR LIKE THREE DAYS.

SECOND, YOU WERE LOOKING FOR THE ARMOR OF INVINCIBILITY, NOT THE ARMOIRE.

HA! SHOWS WHAT *YOU* KNOW THANKS TO THE ARMOIRE, I HAVEN'T BEEN HIT BY AN ENEMY *YET!*

I'M AFRAID I DON'T FOLLOW.

WAIT! I HAVE AN EVEN BETTER SOLUTION.

STAY TUNED!

SAME 8-BIT TIME!

SAME 8-BIT URL.

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WE DON'T HAVE TO CARRY THAT CUMBERSOME ARMOIRE AROUND WITH US.

OH YES WE DO! I SHALL NEVER GO BACK NOW THAT I HAVE TASTED OF SWEET, *SWEET* INVINCIBILITY.

IT TASTES LIKE VARNISH.

NOT MANY PEOPLE KNOW THAT.

YOU WON'T HAVE TO GIVE UP THE ARMOIRE'S INVINCIBILITY...

THAT'S THE *BEAUTY* OF THIS PLAN.

MUST... DESTROY.

AM I THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN SEE THAT IT'S NOT ACTUALLY INVINCIBLE?! IT'S JUST REALLY HEAVY. THAT'S ALL.

...ONLY IT'S INCREDIBLE BURDEN AND SPINAL HAZARDS. INTERESTED?

SPINAL HAZARDS *ARE* HAZARDOUS. SURE!

WE'LL SIMPLY STORE THE ARMOIRE INSIDE AN EXTRA-SPATIAL OBJECT! I HAPPEN TO HAVE A HYPERCUBE IN CASE OF JUST SUCH A NECESSITY.

HOLD IT!

AGAIN.

WHY ARE WE EVEN MENTIONING SEMI-REGULAR POLYHEDRON AND REAL SPACE?!

I'VE GOT AN 8 IN SUPER-DIMENSIONAL PHYSICS. WHAT'S YOUR EXCUSE, HM?

I TOOK A FEW SUMMONING COURSES BACK IN BLACK MAGIC COLLEGE

GET THIS DAWN THING OUTTA MY HAT

SO I KNOW A THING OR TWO ABOUT ACCESSING 16-BIT DIMENSIONAL PLANES.

THEN YOU'RE NO STRANGER TO THIS...

SUMMONING

YES, ALSO KNOWN AS A HYPERCUBE

OR A SUMMONING CUBE, AMONG MAGICKAL CIRCLES DUE TO THEIR EXTRAPOLATION FROM THE OLD STYLE SUMMONING SQUARES

WHAT'S ALL THIS CUBE TALK? IT'S A BALL, DUH!

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING, IT'S A HIGH DIMENSIONAL CUBE THAT'S DISTILLED INTO OUR OWN 8-BIT UNIVERSE

IT *LOOKS* LIKE A BALL TO US BECAUSE WE LACK THE 16-BIT SENSES AND SPATIAL AWARENESS TO PROPERLY PERCEIVE ITS ACTUAL FORM.

WELL... YEAH.

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OKAY, SO HOW IS THIS SUMMONING CUBE--

YOU MEAN HYPERCUBE

YOU MEAN EASILY PAWNED VALUABLE CRYSTAL ORB THINGIE

YOU MEAN SUPER BOUNCY BALL!

WELL THINK ABOUT IT IF AN 8-BIT SUPER BALL BOUNCES REALLY HIGH, THEN A 16-BIT ONE COULD PROBABLY GO ORB.TAL!

AWYEAH

SO HOW IS THIS... *THING* GOING TO HELP US WITH THE ARMOIRE?

IT'S QUITE SIMPLE REALLY

WE JUST PUT THE HYPER-CUBE INTO THE ARMOIRE..

AND GET SUPER DIMENSIONAL PHYSICS TAKE ITS COURSE!

HRRRRRRMMMMMMMSHHHHHHHLORRRRRRRRP!

I WOULDN'T SUGGEST STANDING SO CLOSE TO THE GRAVITIC REACTIONS BUT..

WHAT ARE YOU LAUGHING ABOUT?

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CAN WE GET BACK ON TRACK?

WE'RE STILL POISONED AND PRAVOKA ISN'T JUST AROUND THE CORNER.

HECKLE
SNICKER
TAUNT
LAUGH

YEAH, SURE, WHAT-EVER YOU SAY

SNORT

AHEM. YEAH, LET'S GO!

GIGGLE

GIVE ME MY HAT BACK, YOU BLASTED THEORETICAL SPACE-TIME MODEL!

I NEED THAT <3!

ADJUST

ALIGN

WHO'S LAUGHING NOW!

HAHAHAHAA!

LUCK..Y PRAVOKA WASN'T MUCH FURTHER.

SO, WE'RE HEADED TO PRAVOKA

AND WE'RE GONNA FIGHT SOME PIRATES. SO.

..YOU COULD SAY THAT WE WILL PRAVOKEM!

...

THAT'S PRAVOKEM. GET IT?

PRAVOKEM "PROVOKE THEM" IT'S FUNNY

SEE, 'CAUSE WHEN WE FIGHT THEM, THEY WILL BE "PROVOKED."

HUH.

IT JUST FELT LIKE A VERY, VERY LONG TRIP

IT WOULD BE SO EASY TO..

WALK WALK WALK WALK

WALK WALK WALK WALK

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AS THE LIGHT WARRIORS NEARED THE PORT TOWN OF PRAVOKA.

I WISH TO POINT OUT THAT I AM ADAMANTLY OPPOSED TO THE ORDER IN WHICH WE ARE WALKING.

WALK WALK WALK WALK

.. AN EVIL FORCE GATHERED ON THE HORIZON.

MUWA HAHAHA! GUWA HAHAHA! UWEE HEHEHE!

AND ER UH..

NEENER NEENER!

YAR! WHAT BE THE HUBBUB, BUB?

NONCHALANT GLANCE!

CONSPIRATORIAL CHECK!

I FOUND A QUARTER AND I'M NOT ASKING IF IT BELONGS TO ANYONE.

THAT'S PLAIN MEAN

AND YE BADGUY VOICE BE AS VICIOUS AS THE STORMY SEA, SO SAYS ME

HEY, THAT'S MEAN

WELL, I DON'T LIKE TO BRAG, BUT I AM A VILLAIN AFTER ALL.

I MUST ADMIT HOWEVER, THAT UNTIL RECENTLY I WASN'T VERY GOOD AT IT. I WAS EVEN DEFEATED BY A BAND OF HEROES. BUT SINCE THAT DAY, I HAVE FELT... DIFFERENT.

ALMOST AS IF I HAVE BEEN SOARING WITH EVIL DETERMINATION!

WOOOSH!

IT'S LIKE I'M AT LEAST TWICE AS EVIL AS I USED TO BE!

TWICE AS EVIL? FROM BEING DEFEATED? AND YOU'RE ALREADY UP TO PETTY THEFT?

YAR.

YUP.

YOU'RE NOT HUMAN! YOU'RE A THING! THEY GREW YOU IN A LAB!

I'LL NOT MEDDLE IN SUCH WANTON DEVILTRY AND YAR!

MY CREW WON'T BE YOUR PLAYTHING!

I WILL BE PAYING YOU, OF COURSE.

CONSIDER THE LIVES OF ME CREW TO BE FORFEIT.

I'M SURE IT WON'T COME TO THAT.

IT WILL IF I SAYS IT WILL.

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ME AND ME MATES WILL AMBUSH THESE LAND LUBBER LIGHT WARRIORS.

AND YOU'LL BE GIVIN' US YE GOLD

YAR.

YOU'LL BE RICH AND I'LL BE RID OF THOSE PESKY HEROES.

THEY WHO HAVE HUNTED ME RELENTLESSLY ACROSS THIS FORSAKEN REALM! THEY WHO HAVE BEEN MY ETERNAL FOES FOR ALMOST HALF A WEEK! I SHALL REVEL IN THEIR HORRIBLE AND VERY GRUESOME DEFEAT!

YAR! LET US CELEBRATE OUR VILLAINOUS BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP WITH A ROUND OF ALE!

YE POINT?

ME POINT, ER, MY POINT IS THAT PRAVOKA IS NOW A GHOST TOWN!

SO... IF PRAVOKA BE A GHOST TOWN BECAUS WE STOLE EVERY THING, YAR!

THAT MEANS IT'S ALL BACK ON ME SHIP! I THINK I'LL RENAME 'ER THE PARTY BARGE!

WE'LL SAIL 'ROUND THE WORLD HAVING MISADVENTURES TINGED WITH SLAPSTICK AND ROWDINESS!

THAT MAY BE EASIER SAID THAN DONE.

YOUR PIRATES ALREADY PILLAGED THIS TOWN FOR ALL IT WAS WORTH.

OKAY... BUT FIRST LET'S TAKE CARE OF THEM LIGHT WARRIORS.

AYE! THEY BE LIKE A THORNY THORN IN YE SIDEY SIDE.

YAR!

BE YE MAKIN' FUN OF ME ACCENT, SONNY-JIM? YAR

MEEP! A-ACCENT? W-WHAT ACCENT? I DON'T HEAR ANY ACCENT. GULP.

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SO? WHAT DO YOU GUYS SEE?

THERE'S ONLY ONE SHIP AT THE DOCKS.

IT BEARS THE MARK OF THE RAPSCALLIONS OF THE INNER SEA.

I COUNT NINE PIRATES ABOARD

OKAY, SO THERE'S A BUNCH OF PIRATES.

AND WE'VE GOT TO GET AT THEIR BIG BAD PIRATE CAPTAIN SO WE CAN GET THAT WITCH HER CRYSTAL THINGIE BACK

THE NINE OF THEM VS. THE FIVE OF US? I *LIKE* THOSE ODDS.

I *LIKE* THOSE ODDS.

FIGHTER, THERE'S *FOUR* OF US.

THEY'RE A BUNCH OF DORKS ON A BOAT

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!

I COULD PROBABLY NUKE THEM FROM *HERE* WITH A WELL AIMED HADOKEN.

THOSE UNLUCKY ENOUGH TO SURVIVE THE EXPLOSION WOULD DROWN IN THE *MANGLED* WRECKAGE OF THEIR SHIP

PROBLEM SOLVED

BLUD BLUD

THEREFORE, WHAT WE MUST DO IS THIS.

WE SHALL OUT FLANK AND BEGUILE THEM WITH THE BRILLIANT STRATEGY I'M SKETCHING INTO THE SAND AT THIS MOMENT

IT'LL CONSIST OF A MULTI-PRONGED ATTACK FROM ALL FLANKS, THUS THROWING THEM INTO A STATE OF CONFUSION AND DEFEAT

IT SHALL BE REMEMBERED AS THE "RED MAGE MANUEVER".

MEANWHILE..

.. SO THE PIRATE SAYS, "IT'S DRIVIN' ME NUTS!"

BWAHAHAHA!

LAUGH, DAMN YE! DON'T YE KNOW HILARITY WHEN YE SEES IT? YAR.

"HA", "HA HA".

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CAN SOMEONE EXPLAIN TO ME WHY WE DIDN'T GO WITH MY HADOKEN PLAN?

IT WAS NOT IN OUR PARTICULAR IDIOM.

WHAT YOU MEAN IT WASN'T A GUARANTEED FAILURE?

I DON'T HAVE TO TAKE THAT KIND OF ABUSE

I FULLY UNDERSTAND YOUR MISGIVINGS ABOUT THIS PLAN, BM, BUT TRUST ME IT'S TRULY FOR THE GOOD OF THE GROUP.

INN

YOU JUST DID THAT THING WHERE YOU SAY SOMETHING LIKE "AND BY 'GROUP' I MEAN 'ME'," UNDER YOUR BREATH, DIDN'T YOU.

HRM. CAN YOU PROVE THAT

GUESS NOT

THAT

I CAN ONLY ASSUME WE'RE DOWN HERE IN PRAVOKA BECAUSE THIEF WANTED TO PILLAGE THE TOWN PERSONALLY WITHOUT THE NEED TO BE SNEAKY

I TAKE OFFENSE AT YOUR SLANDEROUS ALLEGATIONS, BM

THERE! THE BASTARD DID IT AGAIN! DIDN'T YOU HEAR HIM

NO, I DIDN'T HEAR ANYTHING

HM, NOR I

LET'S JUST GO, OKAY? I GIVE UP

THAT'S MORE LIKE IT.

I THINK BLACK MAGE IS HEARING THINGS.

HE'S PROBABLY SUFFERING FROM INSANITY EFFECTS

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FIVE MINUTES LATER

WHERE'S THIEF? HE TOLD US TO SPLIT UP AND MEET BACK HERE IN [illegible]

HE COULD AT LEAST OBEY HIS OWN INANE ORDERS.

WHY DID HE INSIST THAT WE SEPARATE ANYWAY?

SO, ARE YOU GUYS READY OR WHAT?

DIDN'T THE PIRATES TAKE EVERYTHING ALREADY?

THEY LEFT EVERY-THING THAT WAS NAILED DOWN I DID NOT

OKAY, I HAVE DILIGENTLY SPENT THE LAST SEVERAL MOMENTS FORGING A PLAN THAT WILL *GUARANTEE* OUR VICTORY. READY?

BRING IT!

BRING IT? HE'S NOT CALLING US OUT, MOMON. SHUSH!

THIEF, YOU WILL SNEAK ABOARD THE PIRATE SHIP AND STEAL ALL THEIR WEAPONS

I THINK I GET IT, BUT ANYWAY I'M ON IT!

FIGHTER, YOU WILL SLAY THEM WITH YOUR MIGHTY ZODIAC KENSHIDO PROWESS

I LIKE THIS PLAN!

BLACK MAGE, YOU WILL PROVIDE HEAVENLY ARTILLERY IN THE FORM OF LIGHTNING WHILE FIGHTER SLAUGHTERS THE STUPID PIRATES

I ADMIT I WAS SKEPTICAL OF THIS PLAN BEFORE, BUT HOW IT APPEALS TO ME FOR SOME REASON

OKAY! LET'S ROCK, BABY

HOLD UP HERE, CAP'N FEATHER-HAT

"CAP'N FEATHER-HAT"?

YOU KNOW WHAT THEY CAN'T ALL BE CLASSICS. ANYWAY, WHAT RED MAGE GOING TO DO?

TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTION, BM, I WILL FULFILL THE ROLE *MOST* VITAL TO OUR SUCCESS TODAY

I'LL BE... WELL, IT'S A *LITTLE* LIKE SUPERVISING, BUT *COMPLETELY* DIFFERENT

I'LL STAY IN THE BACK WHERE I CAN OBSERVE THE BATTLE FROM AFAR AND GIVE COMMANDS TO YOU, MY TROOPS, WHICH REFLECT THE EVER CHANGING FACE OF WAR!

I SEE SO YOU'LL BE *SUPERVISING*, THEN.

PS. WHILE THAT'S CERTAINLY *ONE* INTERPRETATION OF THE JOB I DESCRIBED, IT IS NOT, *NECESSARILY*, A VALID ONE

OF COURSE, IN THIS CASE, IT *IS*.

HOWEVER, I MAINTAIN THAT IT *COULD* HAVE BEEN OTHERWISE IF CONDITIONS WERE DIFFERENT

LET'S JUST GO AND KILL THE PIRATES ALREADY

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HERE, ATOP THE PORT BUILDING, IS THE IDEAL POSITION TO SURVEY FROM.

IMAGES ARE NOT BUILT FOR CLIMBING! I AM LIVING PROOF!

YEAH!

ALL RIGHT, TEAM! ARE WE READY!

NOW GO GET THOSE SUCKERS!

GO, TEAM!

WHAT?!

SEE FOR YOURSELF

WE'RE SO POWERFUL, JUST OUR BATTLECRY KILLED THEM!

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ALL RIGHT, WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

RED MAGE IS CHECKING THEIR VITAL SIGNS AND THIEF IS HELPING HIM.

HM, INTERESTING. YES.

UH YEAH. I M HELPING

MYSELF!

I HAVE COME TO A CONCLUSION FELLOW WARRIORS OF THE LIGHT

GATHER 'ROUND

THIEF, I SAID "GATHER YE ROUND"

OH, YEAH? RIGHT, OKAY UM, RIGHT, BUT I'M UH.. I M STILL "HELPING" THIS GUY

HIS CAPACITY FOR CHARITY IS TRULY BOUNDLESS

INDEED, WE ARE LUCKY TO HAVE HIM ON OUR TEAM

ARE YOU GUYS ACTUALLY THIS STUPID

I HAVE DETERMINED THAT OUR PIRATE FRIENDS AREN'T DEAD!

DUM DUM DUM.

AHEM. THEY ARE SUFFERING FROM SEVERE SCURVY!

STOP THAT!

SCURVY? B-BUT HOW? WE'VE BEEN EATING A BALANCED DIET OF NOTHING BUT CHEETOS FOR THE LAST THREE MONTHS.

I THINK THAT EXPLAINS IT RIGHT THERE BUDDY.

WAIT, WHY WOULD YOU EAT NOTHING BUT CHEETOS FOR THREE MONTHS?

TO AVOID GETTING SCURVY, OF COURSE

WE NEED VITAMIN C SO THAT WE DON'T GET SCURVY WELL, ORANGES DON'T LAST TOO LONG ON OUR LENGTHY VOYAGES.

SO THIS ONE NUTRINALIST DOWN AT THE PORT IN CRIMINAL CITY GAVE US A HUGE LOAD OF CHEETOS.

NUTRINALIST?

HE SAID THAT CHEETOS ARE ORANGE, SO THEY'RE JUST AS GOOD FOR YOU AS REAL ORANGES.

AKBAR'S DISCOUNT NUTRINAL OUTLET

NOT EXTREMELY UNHEALTHY

SUCKERS!

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DUM DE DUM...

HEY HE TOOK MY WALLET..

THUNK!

AND ONE MORE FOR GOOD MEASURE..

THIEF YOU'RE ST[illegible] HELPING THE POOR [illegible] PIRATES I SEE.

ER

IN [illegible] BROAD TERMS YE, YOUR STATEMENT IS CORRECT

THAT'S SO GOOD OF YOU, THIEF

HOWEVER, AS THE OFFICAL SUPERVISER, I BELIEVE YOUR TALENTS WOULD BE BETTER PUT TO USE SEARCHING THE SHIP

WE NEED TO FIND MATOYA'S CRYSTAL THINGIE AND FAST

EEEEEK!

IT'S BIKKE THE PIRATE, *TERROR* OF THE INNER SEAS!

NO OFFENSE, BUT IT'S KINDA HARD TO TAKE A GUY SERIOUSLY AS THE "TERROR OF THE INNER SEAS" WHEN HE SCREAMS LIKE A LITTLE GIRL

YAR!

YAR, DID YE HEAR THAT? THEY THINK THAT WAS **MY** SCREAM, YE COWARD YAR

SORRY, BUT I GOT SCARED

MEANWHILE, INSIDE THE PIRATE SHIP

DID WE FIND IT YET?

DID WE FIND IT YET?

DID WE FIND IT YET?

DID WE FIND IT YET?

DID WE FIND IT YET?

DID WE FIND IT YET?

DID WE FIND IT YET?

WHY ISN'T THIEF DOWN HERE YET?

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HOW COULD THIS HAVE HAPPENED TO ME CREW? YAR.

I TOLD YOU THEY WERE TRICKY. BUT DID YOU LISTEN? NO. . . . "NINE VS. FOUR? THAT'S THREE TO ONE IN OUR FAVOR, YAR."

LET ME TELL YOU, I FIND YOUR MATH TO BE HIGHLY SUSPECT.

C'MON, B-M!

TOUCH ME AND DIE!

BUT HOW! YAR, HOW COULD THESE LIGHT WARRIORS HAVE DEFEATED A FULL *NINE* FIERCE PIRATES?

OH, TECHNICALLY, MR. PIRATE SIR, WE DIDN'T REALLY—

NOOOO

Y'AAAAAAA—DANG IT, GOTTA MAKE A CLIMB CHECK TO GET UP THERE... BLAST IT ALL! FAILED! MUST WAIT UNTIL NEXT TURN TO RETRY WITH A FRUSTRATION PENALTY!

SO ANYWAY. LIKE I WAS SAYIN'..

WHAT REALLY DEFEATED YOUR BAND OF PIRATES WAS, IN FACT—

AH-HA! MADE IT! AHEM.

Y'AAAAAAAAR!

MAN, THIS SHIP IS BIG...

GASP

Y'AAAAAAAAAR!

SPLOOSH!

ER, WHAT HE WAS *GOING* TO SAY IS THAT WE DID, INDEED, BEAT YOUR STUPID PIRATES AND THAT WE, THEREFORE, DESERVE ALL THE EXPERIENCE.

HEH. LOOKS LIKE IT'S HARD TO SWIM WITH ARMOR

GIVE MY REGARDS TO THE BOTTOM OF THE OCEAN, SINKY!

BURBLE!

MEANWHILE, I GROW MORE RICH ON THE TRAGEDY OF "NUTRINALLY" INDUCED SCURVY! THEY ARE *SUCKERS*!

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BIKKE AND GARLAND MADE A DARING ESCAPE TO THE PRAVOKA DOCKS.

SO WHY IS IT WE RAN LIKE DOGS? YAR

ARE YOU MAD?!

I'D SAY HEXED YAR

THOSE ACCURSED LIGHT WARRIORS DEFEATED YOUR ENTIRE PIRATE CREW! YOUR VICIOUS, VICIOUS PIRATE CREW!

AYE, THAT BE TRUE, THAT BE TRUE.

BUT I WOULDN'T CHARACTERIZE ME CREW AS BEING VICIOUS PER SE. YAR

AT LEAST, NOT SINCE THE SCURVY TOOK THEIR STRENGTH AWAY YAR

WHAT.

I CAN'T AFFORD REAL ORANGES, SO THEY BEEN EATIN' CHEETOS FOR THREE, MAYBE FOUR MONTHS NOW. YAR

THEY BE WEAK AS KITTENS.

AYE. THAT WAS THE WORK O' THE SCURVY YAR

UNDER NORMAL CIRCUM-STANCES, YE WOULD'VE GONE FROM LIVING TO MEAT IN UNDER FIVE SECONDS. YAR

SO... I'M NOT A TOTAL BAD ASS FUELED BY RELENTLESS EVIL?

BUT... WHAT ABOUT THE GRUELING HENCH-MAN INTERVIEW PROCESS? I HIRED YOU GUYS BECAUSE A BIG MEAN VILLAIN LIKE ME HAS TO BE ABLE TO BEAT UP HIS HENCH-MEN AND YOUR PIRATES WERE THE ONLY GUYS I COULD PUSH AROUND.

BY NEPTUNE'S BEARD, YE BE ONLY SLIGHTLY LESS BAD ASS THAN KELP!

IF'N IT BE ANY CONSOLATION TO YE, IT IS EVIL TO BEAT UP ON PEOPLE WHAT IS RIDDLED WITH SCURVY.

AWW, SHUCKS. YOU'RE JUST SAYIN' THAT TO MAKE ME FEEL BETTER.

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I CAN TELL THAT THIS IS A BAD PLAN RED MAGE CAME UP WITH IT

TRUST ME, THIS ONE'LL WORK I MEAN, IT'S BOUND TO HAPPEN ONE OF THESE DAYS.

THOUGH I HARDLY FIND THAT TO BE A WORTHY CASE FOR GOING WITH THIS PLAN...

HAS IT OCCURED TO YOU THAT THEY'RE RIGHT BEHIND US?

THEY PROBABLY HEARD THE WHOLE THING.

AWW, THIS IS ALL OUT OF CHARACTER, WE'RE COOL.

OUT OF... WHAT DOES THAT EVEN MEAN?!

SHH! IT'S TIME! GET IN POSITION, GUYS!

THERE ON MY MARK... MARK!

SHWN

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED, I REPEAT, THE EAGLE HAS LANDED. OVER

BLACK MAGE! ON MY MARK... MARK!

GO ON, BLACK MAGE. GET IN POSITION AND SAY YOUR LINES!

HOWEVER, KNOW THIS YOUR LIFE HAS JUST BECOME SHORT AND PAINFUL.

AHEM.

Good morrow Sir/Madam [select appropriate]

Such lovely/ unseasonal [select one] weather we are having, eh what?

HA-HA

CURTIS

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Trips lead to absences
Absences lead to guest strips.
Guest strips... lead to copyright infringement.
Yes, I sense much copyright infringement in this.

NOBODY CAN TRULY GUESS WHY THE GODS CREATED SUCH A DESTRUCTIVE FORCE, AND WHY ACCESS TO IT CAN BE GRANTED TO MERE MORTALS. REGARDLESS, HOWEVER, THE POSSIBILITY IS THERE.
AS WITH ANY POWER, USED INCORRECTLY, THIS DIVINE GIFT CAN BE MISUSED WITH UTMOST DISREGARD FOR THE WELL-BEING OF OTHERS.
IN THE HANDS OF A PSYCHOPATH, THIS POWER WILL CAUSE FEAR AND DESTRUCTION THROUGHOUT THE LAND.
HAHAHAHAHA
BUT, AS WITH ANY POWER OF THIS VARIETY....
THE GODS CREATED A BALANCE, A WAY TO RESIST THIS OPPRESSION IF THEIR GIFTS HAD BEEN ABUSED....
SHORYUKEN!
UMM, I TRIED DOING THAT HADOKEN THINGY... BUT I THINK I GOT THE BUTTONS MIXED UP. CAN YOU SHOW ME AGAIN?
HEY, YOU MIGHT WANT TO PUT ANOTHER TOKEN IN THE MACHINE...

FIGHTER. FIGHTER. IT'S ME, DR. SWORDOPOLIS. CAN YOU HEAR ME, FIGHTER?

BURBLEY.

...I'LL TAKE THAT AS A YES.

FIGHTER, I HAVE ***MUCH*** TO TELL YOU BUT PRECIOUS LITTLE TIME IN WHICH TO TELL IT

BURBLE.

IT'S SAFE TO SAY THAT YOUR RESPONSE WAS A NON SEQU.TOR AND PROBAB.Y FOOD RELATED, ISN'T IT.

I THOUGHT AS MUCH.

BUBBLE BURBLE

THIS IS OF THE ***GRAVEST*** IMPORT DO YOU RECALL THAT WHICH WE SPOKE OF WHEN LAST I VISITED YOU?

REGARDLESS, ***YOU*** ARE THE CHOSEN WARRIOR, FIGHTER

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IT IS YOU WHO SHALL BE AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE DARK DAYS THAT IMPERIL YOUR WORLD.

YOU WILL STAND ALONE AGAINST THE TIDE OF DARKNESS.

YOU WILL BE AS THE SWORD OF VIRTUE THAT PIERCES THE HEART OF EVI..

WITHOUT YOU, THERE IS NO HOPE.

GAG...

TSK. I KNOW MY LANGUAGE CAN BECOME EMBE...ISHED, HOWEVER THIS IS A MATTER UPON WHICH THE FATE OF THE ***WORLD*** RESIDES.

THERE'S NO NEED TO BE ***RUDE*** ABOUT IT I CAN'T VERY WELL SAY "YO, FIGHTER, BUST SOME HEADS."

GAG!

OH, YOU'RE ACTUALLY GAGGING. SORRY, I TEND TO FORGET ABOUT THE PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS OF YOU MATERIAL BEINGS.

HOLD ON, LET ME SL.CE SPACE-TIME. IT'LL BE ***INCREDIBLY*** PAINFUL, BUT IT WON'T HAVE HAPPENED BY THE TIME I'M THROUGH, SO DON'T WORRY

GAGR

YEAH, I DON'T FULLY UNDERSTAND IT MYSE..F.

YAR, WE DEFEATED ME CREW IN COMBAT UPON THE HIGH SEAS. ME SHIP BE YOURS NOW. 'TIS THE LAW OF THE SEA.

ER, I'VE MEMORIZED *EVERY* HANDBOOK CONCERNING THE HIGH SEAS AND THERE ISN'T A SINGLE PASSAGE THAT GIVES MERIT TO THIS SORT OF EXCHANGE.

FURTHERMORE, YOU WERE DOCKED AT THE TIME.

SO ANYTHING ON THE BOAT WOULD FALL UNDER THE CIVIL LAWS OF THE CITY AND COUNTY OF PRAVOKA.

NOT THIS ALLEGED LAW OF THE SEA.

NOT TO MENTION THAT SCURVY KILLED OFF YOUR PIRATES *WAY* BEFORE WE COULD.

QUIET, YOU FOOL!

ER, WHAT MY *ESTEEMED* COLLEAGUE MEANT WAS THAT THE SCURVY KILLED ER, UH... THEIR FIGHTING SPIRIT

YES, THAT SOUNDS REASONABLE

YOU MAY REST ASSURED THAT THEIR ACTUAL DEFEAT *WAS* A DIRECT RESULT OF OUR ACTIONS.

SHE NE'ER WAS THE FASTEST BOAT OR THE STURDIEST OR THE PRETTIEST BUT SHE WAS A GOOD BOAT, I CAN TELL YE THAT

IT BREAKS ME HEART TO GIVES HER TO YE

HAVE YOU HEARD *ANYTHING* I SAID?

SHE'LL TAKE YOU WHERE YOU NEED TO BE GOIN', THOUGH. IF'N YOU NEED TO BE GOIN' ON THE SEA, THAT IS.

YES, BUT IT'S *YOUR* SHIP

IMAGINE TRYING TO SAIL A SHIP ACROSS A MOUNTAIN RANGE. COULDN'T BE DONE, YE UNDERSTAND.

IS ANY OF THIS GETTING THROUGH?

IT'S A MATTER OF LOGISTICS. THERE'S JUST TOO MUCH MOUNTAIN IN THE WAY

HEY, HE WANTS TO GIVE US HIS SHIP, I SAY WE *LET* HIM.

I WON'T EVEN HAVE TO WRITE UP A SCAM CONTRACT FOR IT

ER, THAT'S NOT PARTICULARLY MORAL

PIRATE BOATS HAVE TREASURE *TREASURE* IS BOUND TO HAVE A MAGICAL ITEM OR TWO.

SO DOES THIS THING HAVE A DEED OR A REGISTRATION OR WHAT?

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HEH, HEH, THAT ARMOR FINALLY CAME IN HANDY.

PREPARE YOURSELF, FIGHTER. I SHALL CUT THROUGH REALITY AS YOU KNOW IT AND SPLICE A NEW OUTCOME.

ONE WHERE, Y'KNOW, YOU DON'T DROWN.

THIS WILL REQUIRE A CUT OF THE UTMOST PRECISION. THE MARGIN OF ERROR COULD BE BEST EXPRESSED AS THE WIDTH OF A FEW ATOMS.

SLICE!

HEH, HEH, THAT ARMOR FINALLY CAME IN HANDY.

HEH, I'M NOT DEAD! AWESOME!

ANOTHER PERFECTLY CALCULATED SPACE-TIME SLICE-N-SPLICE. NOW TO GET BACK TO... WAIT A SECOND.

I FORGOT TO CARRY THE TWO!

AND I'M 10,000 FEET UP IN THE AIR.

OH DANG IT

IT'S BEEN SEVERAL MINUTES SINCE THE LAST TINY BUBBLE HAS BROKEN THE SURFACE.

HM.

OH HOW SWEET IT IS.

THE ONLY THING SPOILING THIS PERFECT MOMENT IS THAT ANNOYING SOUND FROM ABOVE THAT KEEPS GETTING LOUDER.

NO TIME TO LOOK IN ITS DIRECTION THOUGH.

TOO BUSY BEIN' HAPPY

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3 SECONDS LATER...

WOW. WHAT AN ADVENTURE I HAD!

FIRST I NEARLY DROWNED, THEN I FELL OUT OF THE SKY, AND LIVED TO TELL THE TALE!

I CAN'T WAIT TO TELL BLACK MAGE ALL ABOUT IT

WHEREVER HE IS.

ORGAN RUPTURED!

YOU DIDN'T PICK UP ANY EXTRA EXPERIENCE, DID YOU?

I SURE AS HELL DIDN'T LEARN ANYTHING, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU MEAN.

CLOSE ENOUGH.

I DON'T LIKE YOU AND YOU DON'T LIKE ME NOW TALK!

WE DON'T LIKE ME! BUT WE DON'T EVEN KNOW EACH OTHER! I BET'S WE HAVE A LOT IN COMMON! TREACHERY AND SUCH. HAR.

TOUCHE. I WAS NEVER VERY GOOD AT THESE NON-BACK STAB CONFRONTATIONS.

RM, YOU TAKE HIM. BUT LOOK OUT, HE'S A TOUGH ONE TO CRACK.

NOT FOR LONG!

ALL RIGHT, BIKKE. WHAT'D YOU DO WITH MATOYA'S CRYSTAL?

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YE TALKING ABOUT

DON'T PLAY DUMB WITH ME, SEA-DOG!

YEAH, THAT'S MY JOB!

MUSTER MY LAST OUNCE OF STRENGTH TO STAB FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE

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OKAY. LET ME PUT IT TO YOU *THIS* WAY THEN DID YOU STEAL MATOYA'S CRYSTAL!

NO!

NO? OR. *YES*?

ER... I SEE YOU AND UH...

DAMN YE AND YE BLACK OPS MIND GAMES!

YES, I STOLE IT! AND I'D STEAL IT *AGAIN* GIVEN HALF THE CHANCE!

I JUST WANTED TO FEEL LIKE A BIG EVIL MAN. IS THAT REALLY SO WRONG?

WELL, *YEAH*

NOW QUIT CRYING AND TELL US WHERE THE CRYSTAL IS!

YA BIG BABY

SNIGGLE

I SOLD IT, I DID TO SOME ELFISH FELLOW. IN *ELFLAND*

AH-HA!

THEN LET US DISEMBARK FOR ELFLAND POST HASTE!

ELFLAND? DO YOU *REALLY* THINK THAT'LL BE NECESSARY?

WE *MUST* COMPLETE THE SIDEQUEST

IT'S A SACRED BOND

YEAH. PLUS WE REALLY NEED THE NIGHTMARE POISON ANTIDOTE AND THE CRYSTAL IS THE ONLY WAY

REALLY HAVE TO GO TO

THREE HOURS LATER, HALF WAY ACROSS THE ALDI SEA...

WE HEARD YOU THE FIRST TIME.

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WE DIDN'T HAVE TO GO TO ELF LAND.

THUMP!

WHAT ABOUT OUR HORRIBLE, HORRIBLE NIGHTMARES, THIEF?

LAST NIGHT I DREAMT THAT NAPALM DEMONS MADE ME DRINK A GALLON OF GLASS SHARDS SOAKED IN HOT SAUCE WHICH, ITSELF, WAS ON FIRE.

THUMP!

THEN IT'S SETTLED WE'RE GOING TO ELF LAND

YEAH, ME TOO.

THUMP!

ER... DO YOU GUYS HEAR THAT?

HEAR WHAT?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "WHAT"?

THUMP!

THAT!

OH, THAT

YEAH, THAT'S JUST HORRIBLE FANGED DEATH FROM THE BRINY DEPTHS OF THE SEA ATTEMPTING TO KILL US. PAY IT NO MIND

THUMP! THUMP!

DEAL WITH IT ALL AND THOUGHT SOMETHING WAS WRONG

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I WOULDN'T WORRY ABOUT IT, FANGED DEATH FROM THE SEA IS QUITE ROUTINE.

ROUTINE
I SEE. PRETEND FOR A MOMENT THAT I'M YOUR TYPICAL CONJURER OF DARK ARTS.

AND, AS A RESULT, HAVE ABOUT AS MUCH BUSINESS ON A SEA GOING VESSEL AS A PRETTY UNICORN PRINCESS.

THUMP!

DONE.

THANK YOU, NOW— WAIT!

SHOULD I BE WORRIED, IMPRESSED, OR INSULTED THAT YOU COULD SO EASILY IMAGINE ME AS A PRETTY UNICORN PRINCESS?

THUMP!

WELL, THE RESEMBLENCE IS REMARKABLE, ACTUALLY

JUST GET ON WITH IT!

THUMP! THUMP!

EXPLAIN, IN SIMPLE TERMS, HOW "FANGED DEATH FROM THE DEPTHS" COULD *EVER* BE ROUTINE.

WELL, *FIRST*, IT'S A BIT MISLEADING TO REFER TO THE ALDI SEA AS "THE DEPTHS" SINCE IT IS AN EXTREMELY SHALLOW BODY OF WATER

THUMP!

IN FACT, NAUTICOLOGISTS REFER TO IT AS THE "FISHIN' HOLE OF THE WORLD"

THUMP!

THIS IS *ALSO* MISLEADING BECAUSE NO ONE IN THEIR RIGHT MIND WOULD BE CAUGHT DEAD FISHING IN THE ALDI.

THUMP!

IT'S SO FULL OF POLLUTANTS AND MAGICAL RUNOFF FROM NATION-STATES SUCH AS CORNERIA, PRAVOKA, ELFLAND AND, UNTIL RECENTLY, PRONTERA, THAT--

SHUT UP!

THUMP!

GET TO THE FANGED DEATH OR YOU WILL BECOME *INTIMATELY* FAMILIAR WITH STABBITY DEATH.

ISN'T THERE NO NEED TO YELL

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AS I WAS SAYING, THE ALDI SEA IS SO FULL OF HAZARDOUS MATERIALS THAT ITS HABITANTS HAVE BEEN.. ALTERED

EITHER THROUGH MUTATION AS IN THE CASE OF CLAMZILLA

OR EVOLUTION AS IN THE CASE OF THE LAND SHARK

THUMP!

LAND SHARKS AREN'T REAL

DON'T YOU BELIEVE IT!

SO THE DENIZENS OF THE ALDI SEA CONSIST PRIMARILY OF DANGEROUS AND AGGRESSIVE BEASTS THE LIKES OF WHICH GOD NEVER INTENDED

THAT THUMPING YOU HEAR IS JUST THE SOUND OF THOSE VICIOUS SEA-MUTANTS THRASHING THEMSELVES AGAINST OUR HULL IN A DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO DEVOUR OUR TASTY NUTRIENT-RICH FLESH

THUMP!

THUMP!

OUR FLESH!? BUT THAT'S WHERE I KEEP MY DELICIOUS NUTRIENTS!

WHICH IS PRECISELY THE POINT, I'M AFRAID

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!

THUMP!

THUMP!

JUMP OVERBOARD! IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO SAVE YOURSELF FROM THE SEA-MONSTERS!

THUMP!

ANYWAY! WHY IS IT THAT YOU DON'T SEEM WORRIED?

THEY MAY BE MONSTERS, BUT THEY'RE SEA MONSTERS.

WHAT'RE THEY GONNA DO? FLOP AROUND ON DECK AND SUFFOCATE AT US THREATENINGLY?

POINT

FIGHTERS AND SWORDSMITHS FIRST

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OKAY, SO THE SEA MONSTERS AREN'T A *DIRECT* THREAT

BUT IT SOUNDS LIKE THEY'RE HITTING THE HULL AWFULLY HARD.

YES, BUT, AS I SAID, THESE ATTACKS ARE *ROUTINE*. WHY, THEY'RE AS MUCH A PART OF SAILING AS THE WATER. SHIPS ARE DESIGNED WITH THESE AGGRESSIVE ATTACKS IN MIND. WE'RE FINE.

OH. WELL, *GOOD*

UNLESS.

NO UNLESS. *UNDO* UNLESS

THIS IS A UNIVERSE SANS UNLESS!

WELL, I WAS JUST THINKING

IF BIKKE WAS AN IRRESPONSIBLE CAPTAIN HE MIGHT HAVE SKIMPED ON A FEW THINGS.

LIKE THE EXPENSIVE AND FREQUENT REPAIRS THAT ARE FAIRLY INTEGRAL TO THE HULL NOT, Y'KNOW COLLAPSING.

YOU CAN PUT YOUR ARMS DOWN.

SORRY

WAIT, WAIT, WAIT LET'S GET BACK TO THESE HULL REPAIRS *HOW* INTEGRAL ARE WE TALKING HERE?

WELL, Y'KNOW HOW YOU NEED *MP* TO CAST MAGIC SPELLS?

YEAH.

OH.

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WELL, I'M SURE WE HAVE NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT

BIKKE SEEMED THE RESPONSIBLE SORT

I MEAN HE ONLY FED HIS FAITHFUL, LOYAL, BELOVED PIRATE CREW CHEETOS FOR THREE MONTHS BECAUSE IT WAS CHEAPER THAN REAL FOOD

AND SINCE THAT LED DIRECTLY TO THEIR DEATHS, HE WAS THEN ABLE TO KEEP ALL THE MONEY GARLAND PAID FOR HIS FULL CREW TO KILL US.

MONEY THAT WOULD'VE UNDOUBTEDLY GONE TOWARD THE UPKEEP OF THIS BOAT HAD HE NOT INSISTED UPON GIVING IT TO US.

WHY DOES THIS SOUND LIKE SOMETHING THIEF WOULD DO?

MEANWHILE, INSIDE THE PRAVOKA CASINO...

SUCKERS!

THIS IS TAKING ENTIRELY TOO LONG.

HEY! CAPTAIN TALKS TOO MUCH, QUIET TIME IS NOW.

YEAH, BUT--

QUIET!

DEPLOY THE ROCKET BOAT!

I THINK HE'S CRAZY.

THE STRESS HAS CLEARLY GOTTEN THE BETTER OF HIM.

YOU DO REALIZE THAT THERE ARE NO ROCKET BOATS.

AREN'T THERE, RED MAGE? ARE'NT THERE?

TAKE, FOR INSTANCE, THE FOLLOWING EVIDENCE WHICH, I'M SURE, YOU WILL FIND MOST COMPELLING.

BOATDOKEN!

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A MINUTE AGO, IN THE SHIP'S CARGO HOLD.

I CAN'T BELIEVE WE'RE HEADED TO ELFLAND.

I HAVEN'T YET COMPLETED MY MISSION.

I SUPPOSE IT WOULD HAVE HAD TO COME OUT EVENTUALLY THAT I *AM* ELVEN.

LORD KNOWS THESE *SHOES* WEREN'T FOOLING ANYBODY.

ELFLAND WAS A GOOD A PLACE AS ANY TO TELL THEM. AT LEAST IF THEY REACT POORLY, THE CITY GUARD WILL BE ONE OF THEM.

BUT IF MY *TRUE* IDENTITY WERE TO BE KNOWN... PERHAPS I WILL BE ABLE TO REMAIN INCOGNITO DURING OUR STAY.

AFTERALL, THEY DON'T *NEED* TO KNOW WHO I AM AND IT MAY BE IN THEIR BEST INTERESTS TO REMAIN IGNORANT OF THE REAL TRUTH.

I HOPE THEY APPRECIATE WHAT I DO FOR THEM

BOATDOKEN!

WHAT THE FU--

IT'S A REAL SHAME THAT BOTH OF OUR ORGANIZATIONS REQUIRE THEIR MEMBERS TO TAKE OATHS OF POVERTY

WE *REALLY* COULD HAVE USED SOME CASH TO RENT A BOAT

BURBLE

YES, I'M SURE THEY WENT THIS WAY

IF *YOU* WEREN'T SUCH A SLOW SWIMMER, WE WOULD'VE REACHED THEM BY NOW

KAPOW!

YAR HAR HAR. NOT ONLY DID I BILK GARLAND OUT OF ALL HIS GOLD *AND* KILL ME PIRATES BEFORE THEY COULD HAVE ANY OF IT...

BUT I PAWNED OFF ME DERELICT SHIP TO THEM LIGHT WARRIORS WHO ARE SINKING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CLAMZILLA INFESTED WATERS OF THE ALDI SEA.

YAR, WHAT'S THAT LIGHT?

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN THE *PERFECT* SCAM TOO IF I HADN'T FORGOTTEN TO TAKE THE BOOTY FROM ME SHIP

OH.

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MEANWHILE, SKIMMING ACROSS THE ALDI SEA AT 438MPH...

MAYBE WE SHOULD SLOW DOWN A BIT?

THIEF IS RIGHT. I DON'T THINK WE CAN DOCK AT 400 MPH.

ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU CONSIDER OUR TOTAL LACK OF NAUTICAL ABILITY

NAUTICAL, SHMAUTICAL. GIVE ME ONE HOUR AND I'LL KNOW ENOUGH TO SAIL US INTO *ORBIT!*

I DON'T THINK—

ORBIT, I SAY!

LOOK WE DON'T *HAVE* AN HOUR FOR YOU TO MEMORIZE THE SHIP'S OWNER'S MANUAL.

GIVE ME *SIX* HOURS AND I'LL MASTER TIME MAGIC! THEN WE... HAVE ALL THE TIME WE NEED.

YOU'RE NOT A VERY GOOD TACTICIAN, ARE YOU, RED MAGE.

REGARDLESS, THE ELVISH KINGDOM IS MORE THAN A LITTLE ISOLATIONIST

THEY MAY MISINTERPRET OUR GREAT SPEED AS AN ACT OF AGGRESSION.

I HOPE THEY DON'T PRANCE AROUND WITH HONEY DEW AND FROLICK AMONGST THE GUMDROP TREES.

YEAH, WE'RE *REAL* SCARED OF ELVES!

BUT THE ELVES WON THE GREAT WAR.

CORNERIA WON THE GREAT WAR TWO!

CORNERIA LOST THAT...

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BESIDES, ELF LAND IS A *STUPID* NAME FOR A KING-DOM.

OH YES. AND CORNERIA IS THE PINNACLE OF CLASSY SOVEREIGN NOMENCLATURE, I TAKE IT?

IT'S A NATION NAMED AFTER IT'S PRIMARY AGRICULTURAL PRODUCT

YOU COULD ALWAYS FOLLOW ELF LAND'S LEAD AND NAME YOUR COUNTRY AFTER YOUR PEOPLE.

BUT I DON'T THINK ***POMPOUS DONKEY RIMMER LAND*** WOULD FIT ON A T-SHIRT!

SO THAT'S HOW YOU WANNA PLAY

THE ELVEN COASTAL DEFENSE SYSTEM HAS PROBABLY BEEN COMPLETED AND IT'S GOING TO BECOME A MAJOR CONCERN FOR US IN THE NEAR FUTURE

I DON'T MEAN TO PRY, THIEF, BUT HOW DO YOU KNOW THESE THINGS? DESPITE MY BEST EFFORTS, EVEN MY KNOWLEDGE OF THE ELVEN LANDS IS QUITE LIMITED.

-*Elfant*- very big land animal. Not good for eating.

-*Elfland*- where the Elves come from.

-*El Mariachi*- the bi... Mexican I ever...

WELL, I USED TO.. BACK IN THE DAY I.. ER, I USED TO LIVE NEAR THERE.

THAT'S A SUFFICIENT REASON.

ISN'T IT?

MEANWHILE, IN ELFLAND

THIS IS MOST ALARMING INDEED.

ELVEN SECURITY STATION ALPHA

ARCHER!

ARCHER REPORTING, SIR!

PREPARE THE GIANT CANNON

HIGH VELOCITY IS A CLEAR ... AGGR... TON. KILL ... KIL...

YES SIR!

...STANT CANNON ...PLOYED ...TADY ...NO ...FIRE

AND MAY THE GODS HAVE MERCY ON OUR SOULS.

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GIANT CANNON STATUS: READY.
AIMING STATUS: GRAVITATION, AND MAGNETIC ANOMALY COMPENSATED.

GIANT CANNON READY ON YOUR MARK, CAPTAIN.

TWANG

THE TARGET WILL BE AT THE MINIMUM SAFE DISTANCE AT THE POINT OF IMPACT

GIANT CANNON STATUS: READY.

PREPARE THE DEFENSES FOR A TIDAL BACKLASH.

YES SIR!

MEANWHILE.

AND THAT'S WHY ELVES ARE, SCIENTIFICALLY SPEAKING, DUMB-ASSES.

WHAT DOES ANY OF THAT HAVE TO DO WITH US SLOWING DOWN?

I DIDN'T KNOW ANY BETTER, I'D SAY YOU WERE ANGRY

WHOOSH

NEXT! HEATHEN.

THAT LOOKS JUST LIKE MY— HEY!

OH YE GODS! I

THE FOOLS! THEY HAVE INCREASING MY

LEAVE IT TO THE ELVES TO BUILD A GIANT CANNON JUST TO LAUNCH ONE STUPID ARROW

I DON'T THINK YOU FULLY UNDERSTAND THE PRINCIPLES AT WORK BEHIND THE GIANT CANNON.

WHAT I UNDERSTAND IS THAT...

WAIT, THE BLACK MAGE'S ALMANAC DIDN'T MENTION AN ECLIPSE

THAT'S NO ECLIPSE THAT'S A SUB-ORBITAL GIANT STRIKE!

AND HE'S HOMING IN ON THAT!

MY LUCKY BOW!

I'M RIGHT

ONLY SECONDS TO ACT!

I TOLD YOU TO LET ME MASTER TIME MAGIC, BUT NO.

NO ONE CARES ABOUT YOUR IDIOTIC TIME MAGIC SCHEME, RED MAGE.

JUST TOSS THE ARROW AND PRAY THAT WE MERELY GET MASSIVE INDIRECT DAMAGE INSTEAD OF BEING TOTALLY OBLITERATED

HEY

AND LOSE AN ARROW FOR NO REASON?

WHAT IF I FIND A BOW LATER AND I WANTED TO SHOOT IT?

I THINK NOT

TARGET ACQUIRED

SQUISHING WILL BE IMMINENT.

I WONDER IF THE WALL WASN'T JUST LONG ENOUGH FOR ME TO CONTEMPLATE THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF BEING USED AS A WEAPON OF MASS DESTRUCTION.

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WILL THE LIGHT WARRIORS ESCAPE THE R SQUISHIE DOOM?

DID THIEF TOSS THE TARGETING ARROW OVERBOARD IN TIME?

NOPE!

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED

YOU MEAN THE GIANT?

..YES!

GOOD I ASSUME THAT THE TARGET HAS BEEN, SHALL WE SAY, "TAKEN CARE OF"

GOOD LORD, NO, SIR! THAT WAS A DIRECT HIT [illegible] GIANT [illegible] ORDER [illegible] TRIKE [illegible] TAKE [illegible]

IT'S A FIGURE OF.. NEVER MIND, ARCHER.

IS THE CITY PREPARED FOR THE TIDAL WAVE?

YES, SIR, CAPTAIN!

WOOOo.

THOUGH I RATHER THINK WE MAY HAVE OVER-ESTIMATED ITS THREAT

IT NEVER HURTS TO BE SAFE.

THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT OUR WOULD-BE INVADERS ARE *DEAD*.

CRASH!

ARCHER, WHAT WAS THAT RACKET?

DUNNO, CAPTAIN. BUT IT CAME FROM THE WOMAN'S BARRACKS

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I DEMAND TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON IN THERE!

YE LADYES BARRACKES

AND THIS TIME, I'M NOT LOOKING FOR THE HOT "ELF ON ELF" ACTION ANSWER.

BUT IT IS [illegible] ACCEPTABLE ANSWER!

HERE, PUT THIS ON!

AWW FUG!

HURRY, THERE'S NO TIME!

LOCK THE DOOR, LOCK THE DOOR!

THOSE SOUNDED LIKE MEN'S VOICES, CAPTAIN.

WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT!

YE LADYES BARRACKES

OPEN THIS DOOR! I DEMAND TO BE ALLOWED INSIDE!

RATTLE

I THINK HE'S GONE

YE LADYES BARRACKES

RATTLE

I WANT TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON IN THERE, AND I WANT TO KNOW RIGHT NOW!

RATTLE

ARCHER, YOU MAY RISE.

HOWEVER, IT WOULD SEEM CAPTAIN ARCHER HAS SOME EXPLAINING TO DO.

YE LADYES BARRACKES

[illegible] I CAN EXPLAIN, REALLY!

[illegible] IS HOWEVER THAT IT IS LOGICAL

IT'S ALL QUITE SIMPLE, REALLY

CAPTAIN JUST WANTED TO SEE WHAT WAS GOING ON IN THE LADIES' BARRACKS.

WHY AM I NOT SURPISED? THIS IS THE THIRD TIME THIS MONTH, CAPTAIN.

YE LADYES BARRACKES

I'M [illegible] BUST YOU DOWN TO PRIVATE SO FAST YOU'LL DROP THREE PHYLUMS ON THE WAY THERE.

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WELL, MUCH TO CAPTAIN ARCHER'S CHAGRIN, THE BARRACKS ARE EMPTY.

MY GIRLS ARE PRACTICING ELF-FU IN THE COURTYARD.

LADYES BARRACKES

IMPOSSIBLE! I HEARD A TERRIBLE COMMOTION IN HERE ALL THE WAY FROM SECURITY STATION ALPHA

I DON'T KNOW, BUT I HEARD VOICES FROM BEYOND THIS DOOR JUST PRIOR TO YOUR ARRIVAL

IF IT IS AS YOU SAY, THEN WE SHOULD INSPECT THE BARRACKS FOR NE'ER-DO-WELLS.

LADYES BARRACKES

I'LL JUST UNLOCK THE DOOR HERE...

RUN!

WHERE!

HIDE!

WHERE!

THE ANSWER IS QUITE SIMPLE. WE'RE *NEW* YEAM.

NEW RECRUITS. THAT'S US. YUP

NEW RECRUITS? EVEN THOUGH MY COMMANDING OFFICER'S REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL PERSONEL HAVE RECIEVED NO PRIOR WORD OF YOUR ARRIVAL AND HAVE NO ROOM

DRESS INSTEAD OF

AND WHY DON'T ANY OF YOU LOOK FAMILIAR IN THE SLIGHTEST?

THERE'S SOMETHING VERY STRANGE ABOUT THEM.

SOMEONE SHOULD KEEP AN EYE ON THESE GIRLS FOR REASONS OF SECURITY

I COULD NOT AGREE MORE

THAT SENTENCE WOULD BE A WASTE OF BREATH AS MY ANSWER IS GOING TO BE "NO"

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THERE'S ONE SURE FIRE WAY TO FIND OUT THE REAL TRUTH, HERE.

INTERROGATION!

WHAT ARE YOUR NAMES?

ER.. UH.. OUR NAMES?

I'M DEBORA

HRM

WELL, THOSE *ARE* GIRLS' NAMES. THEIR STORY CHECKS OUT

LET'S GO.

YOU FOUR, I EXPECT YOU TO BE IN FULL BATTLE-DRESS AND DOWN IN THE COURTYARD FOR ELF-FU PRACTICE IN THE NEXT FIVE MINUTES.

YES MA'AM!

THERE'S SOMETHING UNUSUAL ABOUT YOU GUYS. ESPECIALLY THE SKINNY ONE. I'VE A LOT MORE OF HER NEKKID THAN IS

DON'T LOOK AT ME LIKE THAT

I'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT DEBORA WAS A PRETTY NAME

LET'S JUST TRY TO IGNORE RED MAGE'S TRANS-VESTITE URGES AND GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE.

I AM SECURE ENOUGH IN MY OWN SEXUAL IDENTITY AND ORIENTATION THAT I CAN IGNORE YOUR BASE AND INFLAMATORY REMARKS, BLACK MAGE.

IN FACT, I WON'T EVEN DIGNIFY YOUR INFANTILE STATEMENT WITH A RESPONSE

BESIDES, I'M NOT THE ONLY WHO WEARS A LONG, FLOWING GARMENT LIKE SOME OTHER I COULD MENTION

THEY ARE ROBES!

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I CAN'T BELIEVE THEY FELL FOR IT

I TOLD YOU THAT MY *DISGUISE* SKILL WOULD BE HANDY

THAT ONE ELF WAS LOOKIN' AT ME KINDA FUNNY

I SUPPOSE IT WAS A RATHER BRILLIANT STROKE OF MISDIRECTION, IF I DO SAY SO MYSELF.

HE *IS* KINDA CUTE THOUGH.

DAMMIT, FIGHTER

ELF-TEEN MAGAZINE HUNK-O-THE MONTH

LEGOLAS

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WE'VE BOUGHT OURSELVES SOME TIME.

IF WE CAN MAKE IT TO THE BLACK MARKET DISTRICT, THEN I'M SURE I CAN FIGURE OUT WHO BOUGHT MATOYA'S CRYSTAL FROM BIKKE.

OOH! WE'LL STROLL THROUGH THE ENCHANTING STREETS OF ELFLAND'S CAPITAL! WE'LL HAVE EVER SO MUCH FUN AS WE'RE WHISKED AWAY ON AN ADVENTURE THAT BENDS SPACE AND TIME AND GENDER ROLES! NO MORE ITCHY, PINCHY, CONFINING ARMOR FOR ME, NO! I'M FREE!

I'M FLYING, MOM I'M *FLYING*! YOU CAN'T STOP ME NOW!

WHAT? *YOU* TRY WEARING HEAVY ARMOR ALL DAY LONG.

THESE DRESSES ARE QUITE COMFY IN COMPARISON.

BESIDES, MY ASS HAS NEVER LOOKED SO GOOD! MM!

I AGREE WITH BLACK MAGE. BESIDES, THESE HEELS ARE *KILLING* ME.

HE DOES HAVE A POINT

CAN WE JUST GET OUT OF THESE DRESSES, OUT OF THIS CASTLE, AND START KILLING THINGS THAT GET IN OUR WAY? PLEASE?

WAIT A SECOND *HEELS*?

YEAH. THEY GIVE A +1 TO MY CHARISMA STAT WHICH IS IN *SORE* NEED OF BOOSTS.

ZING!

YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN!

SERIOUSLY, THOUGH, AFTER THAT CRAP ABOUT THE TARGETING ARROW AND YOUR INVENTORY, I'M SURPRISED WE GOT YOU OUT OF YOUR STAT-BOOSTING GEAR.

OH, I'M STILL WEARING ALL MY NORMAL STUFF *UNDER* THIS DRESS THANKS TO MY GIRDLE

IT'S AT THE EXPENSE OF SOME OF MY FAVORITE ORGANS, BUT IT'S WORTH IT

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MAN. GETTIN' ZINGED BY FIGHTER HOW MUCH DOES *THAT* HAVE TO SUCK, HUH?

WELL, STATISTICALLY SPEAKING, SLIGHTLY MORE THAN A GIANT *SUCKUSAUR* A DIRE ONE.

NOW CALCULATE THE SUCKINESS AS A FACTOR OF INAB.LITY

SUCKIER THAN A LEVEL 1 RANGER WITH A DULL KNIFE AND A BADGER ANIMAL COMPANION.

'CEPT FOR BLACK MAGE

YES, BLACK MAGE HAS A POINT. WE REALLY OUGHT TO STOP DAWDLING

WOW, THAT *IS* SUCKY

CAN WE JUST GET ON WITH IT!

THANK YOU, RED MAGE.

ER...

WHAT'S THE HOLD UP?

LADIES FIRST!

BWA-HAHAHA HAHAHAHAHA HAHAHAHAHA

I'M BEGINNING TO THINK THEY DON'T RESPECT ME.

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OKAY SO WHERE'S THIS *ALLEGED* ELVEN BLACK MARKET?

THAT'S JUST IT SEE, TO AVOID CERTAIN LEGAL *COMPLICATIONS*, THE EBM IS A MOBILE OPERATION.

YOU NEVER KNOW WHERE IT'LL BE NEXT

I'M SURE THIS [illegible] AND TONIGHT INFORMATION BOOK WILL BE ABLE TO TELL US WHERE IT IS

SHOULD WE SAY ANYTHING?

GUYS! I'VE GOT SOMETHING. APPARENTLY, "A" IS FOR "APPLE"

"B" IS STILL A MYSTERY, BUT MY HOPES ARE HIGH THAT THE *NEXT* PAGE WILL SHED SOME LIGHT ON THAT SUBJECT

LET ME TALK TO H.M.

THE ONLY WAY I KNOW HOW

THAT'S NOT A TRAVEL GUIDE.

AND IN ANY CASE, I SERIOUSLY DOUBT ONE WOULD HAVE INFORMATION ON HOW TO FIND AN UNDERGOUND CRIMINAL TRADING RING.

HM, I WAS HOPING THAT "B" WOULD BE FOR "BLACK MARKET"

BUT NO SUCH LUCK, I'M AFRAID IT'S "BOY"

YOU LEAVE ME PRECIOUS LITTLE ALTERNATIVE

AND I THANK YOU FOR IT

YE LA BARRA

WE DON'T HAVE THE *TIME* FOR ANOTHER STAB-FEST.

JUST ONE! I DESERVE AT *LEAST* THAT MUCH, DAMN YOU!

NOW THAT'S WHAT CALL INCENTIVE CAN DO NO PROBLE

DARN IT "C" IS FOR "COW" I REALLY WISH IT HAD BEEN "CRIMINAL MARKET PLACE" PHOOEY.

YAR!

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AH, I FOUND US A REAL TRAVEL GUIDE

WE'LL TRACK DOWN THAT PESKY BLACK MARKET IN NO TIME!

I THINK I'LL JUST TURN TO THE NEXT PAGE

ZOOMING AROUND MY HEAD WHILST I CONDUCT

EXCUSE ME, GOOD SIR, YOU APPEAR TO BE A NATIVE

MAYHAPS YOU COULD DIRECT ME TO THE NEAREST ELVEN BLACK MARKET?

SIX MINUTES LATER

DON'T LOOK AT ME LIKE THAT HOW WAS I SUPPOSED TO KNOW HE WAS A ROYAL GUARD?!

HINDSIGHT IS ALWAYS 20/20

OKAY, I HAVE SOME GOOD NEWS, AND SOME BAD NEWS.

IF IT'S "WE'RE GOING TO KILL YOU FOR REVENGE" AND "WE'RE IN JAIL, BUT", RESPECTIVELY, THEN I'M *WAY* AHEAD OF YOU.

HA. BUT I TALKED TO SOME OF THE OTHER INMATES ABOUT THE ELVEN BLACK MARKET. MOST OF THESE GUYS ARE JUST PETTY THUGS, BUT SNAKE SEEMED TO HAVE A LEAD ON ITS LOCATION.

SO PRETTY SURE I TALKED MY WAY INTO BETTER

THE BAD NEWS IS THAT SNAKE HAS REQUESTED SOME "DAG" IN EXCHANGE FOR HIS HELP

...ER

NOT KNOWING WHAT THAT WAS, I NATURALLY AGREED THAT WE WOULD PROVIDE HIM WITH ALL THE DAG HE COULD CARRY.

HE SEEMED TO BE QUITE PLEASED AT THE THOUGHT OF THAT

DO YOU HAVE *ANY* IDEA WHAT YOU'VE GOTTEN US INTO? OTHER THAN JAIL.

NOT A CLUE! BUT I CLEVERLY ASSUMED IT WAS SOME KINDA ELF SLANG THAT YOU'D KNOW SINCE YOU USED TO LIVE AROUND HERE. JUST TELL US WHAT IT IS AND WE CAN GET IT FOR HIM AFTER WE BUST OUT OF HERE USING YET *ANOTHER* OF MY INGENIOUS PLANS!

WELL, YEAH, IT IS AN ELVEN SLANG BUT MORE PRISON SLANG

SO WHAT'S IT SLANG FOR THEN?

YEAH, SPIT IT OUT ALREADY

UH, WELL, Y'KNOW THIS *IS* A PRISON AND IT'S FILLED WITH VIOLENT, *LONELY* MEN. Y'KNOW

AND THEY'RE PACKED IN THESE CRAMPED CELLS DAY IN AND DAY OUT. AND... Y'KNOW

SO DAG IS WHAT THEY CALL...

A SHIV?

A SHANK?

NO! IT'S WHISPER, WHISPER, WHISPER.

PERHAPS I COULD RE-NEGOTIATE THE TERMS OF OUR AGREEMENT

YA THINK!

PSST! WHAT DOES "SITUATIONAL HOMOSEXUALITY" MEAN?

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THIS IS NOT WHAT I HAD IN MIND WHEN I BEGAN MY QUEST. HOW DID I TRAVEL SO FAR ONLY TO ARRIVE WHERE I ALL

WHAT DO YOU MEAN I'M THE CUTEST ONE?!

YOU CAN'T EVEN SEE MY FACE!

THEREIN LIES YOUR ADVANTAGE, BM.

HE'S GOT THOSE ROGUE-ISH GOOD LOOKS AFTER ALL.

IF ANYTHING, THIEF SHOULD DO IT

HE SEEMS A LITTLE ELFISH TO ME ANY-WAY

HE'S PROBABLY USED TO IT

THAT'S WHY I

HIGH WARRIOR SCHTICK WOULD BE A GREAT COVER FOR MY ULTERIOR MOTIVES

HAVE KNOWN THAT THEY'D BE SO STUPID

I ONLY PRAY THAT IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO SAVE MY FATHER.

HELLO, CHANCELLOR USURPER

GREETINGS, DOCTOR. HOW ARE OUR PATIENTS ON THIS FINE DAY?

OUR PATRIARCH, KING HROT THE MIGHTY BLOOD CLAN, SUFFERS STILL. BEDRIDDEN AND HARDLY AWARE OF THE WORLD AROUND HIM

WHAT OF OUR PRINCE?

ER AH, THE PRINCE? WHY, HIS CONDITION HAS CONTINUED TO DETERIORATE. YEAH.

AND YOU HAVE SPARED NO EXPENSE IN YOUR VALIANT SEARCH FOR A CURE, I TRUST?

HIS CONDITION LOOKS WORSE THAN EVER

EXCELLENT! THE BEST REVOLUTIONS ARE THE ONES THAT ARE STATE APPROVED!

AND IF NEITHER FATHER NOR SON IS FIT TO TAKE THE THRONE WITHIN A YEAR AND A DAY THE RULERSHIP OF ALL THE LANDS OF ELF SHALL PASS UNTO HE WHO IS CHANCELLOR

I SHALL SEE TO IT PERSONALLY THAT THE NEW SAHN'TA CLAN GOVERNMENT REWARDS YOU MOST HANDSOMELY FOR YOUR EFFORTS, DOCTOR.

I HAVE BEEN.

WHAT WAS THAT, DOCTOR?

ER, I SAID THIS WILL BE A NEW GLORIOUS DAY FOR THE ELVES OF SAHN'TA.

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AND SO, THE LIGHT WARRIORS DID SPEND THE NIGHT IN JAIL.

TRAPPED WITH THE MOST BRUTALLY VIOLENT AND UNBALANCED WASTES OF PROTEIN THAT SOCIETY COULD MUSTER, THE NIGHT WAS TO BE A TRIAL OF THEIR METTLE.

I ***KNOW*** YOU CAN HEAR ME, PRETTY BOY. DO YOU KNOW WHAT I DO TO PRETTY BOYS?

I HURTS 'EM! I MAKE THEM SCREAM. I MAKE THEM ***DIE***

I'VE GOT A CRUDE STABBING IMPLEMENT RIGHT HERE WITH YOUR NAME ALL OVER IT.

YOU WON'T LAST THE NIGHT, PRETTY BOY. THAT'S MY GUARANTEE TO YOU.

I'M GONNA DO IT AS SOON AS YOU'RE ASLEEP TOO. I CAN WAIT

DO YOU THINK YOU CAN LAST ALL NIGHT, BOY? IT'S BEEN A LONG DAY. I KNOW YOU'VE GOTTA BE DAMN TIRED

AND THE THING ABOUT THESE SLABS IS THEY ARE THE MOST UNCOMFORTABLE BEDS YOU WILL ***EVER*** KNOW ALL YOUR DAYS.

AND I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING. I DO. YOU THINK THAT COLD SLAB OF A BED WON'T EVER LET YOU SLEEP

BUT THAT'S HOW IT ***GETS*** YA.

THEY'RE SO HARD AND FLAT AND GODAWFUL THAT THEY MAKE A MAN TIRED JUST THINKING ABOUT 'EM.

IT'LL SUCK THE STRENGTH RIGHT OUTTA YOU AND YOU'LL NEVER KNOW IT

IT'S THE SOUNDEST SLEEP A MAN CAN HAVE. AND STILL BE BREATHIN', THAT IS.

AND THAT'S WHAT I'LL BE WAITING FOR.

THAT'S WHAT I'LL BE LISTENING FOR. THAT LITTLE CHANGE IN THE TEMPO OF YOUR BREATH. THAT'S HOW I WILL KNOW YOU'RE ASLEEP

I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'D DO THEN

MAYBE I'D JUST WAIT

MAYBE I'D LIE HERE AND LISTEN TO YOU DRAW BREATH.

MAYBE I'D TAKE A STEP CLOSER TO YOU WITH YOUR EVERY BREATH.

YOU COULD BE YOUR VERY OWN METRONOME OF DEATH.

MAYBE I'D SUFFOCATE YOU WITH MY PILLOW.

MAYBE I'D CHOKE THE LIFE OUT OF YOU.

SO SLEEK, SO SHARP, SO SILENT

I WONDER WILL I DO IT SLOW OR FAST?

I CAN'T RESIST THE KNIFE

NO. NO, WHO AM I KIDDING? WE BOTH KNOW WHAT I WANT TO DO.

ON THE ONE HAND, I'D ***LOVE*** FOR YOU TO FEEL EVERY INCH OF METAL SLOWLY PIERCE YOUR SKIN AND THEN RIP YOUR BELLY ASUNDER.

JUST THE ***THOUGHT*** PUTS A SMILE ON MY FACE

NOT THAT YOU CAN SEE IT.

BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE'S NOTHING QUITE SO SATISFYING AS SLITTING A MAN'S THROAT

THERE'S SUCH A SINISTER BEAUTY TO THE EFFICIENCY OF IT

THE PAIN OF IT WOULD WAKE YOU UP JUST IN TIME TO DIE.

I'M TRYING TO SLEEP!

ER.. SORRY

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AND SO, THAT MORNING.

I HAVE FORMULATED YET ANOTHER BRILLIANT SCHEME. OUR ESCAPE WILL BE A GREAT SUCCESS.

I ADMIT THAT I HAVEN'T WORKED OUT EVERY LAST DETAIL, BUT I'M CONFIDENT EVERYTHING WILL WORK OUT FOR THE BEST IN THE END.

Jail

Action

Freedom!

Jinx

OKAY LET'S CALL THAT "PLAN STUPID" IN HONOR OF ITS CREATOR, MR. STUPID.

HEH. "MR. STUPID" MAN, WHERE DO I COME UP WITH 'EM!

WELL, I DON'T SEE *YOUR* INGENIOUS PLOT TO FREE US.

YEAH? WELL YOU'RE ABOUT TO SEE IT SO HARD IT'LL MAKE YOUR EYES BLEED, BABY!

SEE, IF THERE'S NO JAIL, THEN WE CAN'T BE STUCK IN IT HA!

HM. YOU CERTAINLY MAKE A COMPELLING CASE.

NO!

..ER, IS WHAT THOSE DARN ELVES WOULD SAY IF YOU DID THAT

YEAH, THAT'S WHAT I MEANT

BESIDES, BM, YOU DON'T WANT TO USE YOUR HADOKEN ATTACK SO SOON

YOU DON'T KNOW ME VERY WELL DO YOU?

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WAS IT JUST ME, OR WAS MATOYA'S NIGHTMARE POISON EVEN *WORSE* LAST NIGHT?

WELL...

THAT IS CREEPY, BUT MINE WAS *WAY* WORSE THAN THAT

YOU CALL BLADELESS HILTS A NIGHTMARE? LET ME INSTRUCT YOU IN THE WAYS OF TERROR.

STR	3
DEX	2
STA	3
INT	2
WIS	3
CON	1
CHA	13

WHILE THE PROSPECT OF YOUR NUDITY *IS* A LESSON IN HORROR, THAT WAS HARDLY NIGHTMARE WORTHY

A TRUE NIGHTMARE OF SUCH INSIDIOUS DESIGN, IT'LL MAKE YOU WISH YOUR BRAINS WOULD IMPLODE JUST SO YOU WON'T HAVE TO CONTEMPLATE IT FURTHER.

WELL WHAT WAS IT, MR. NIGHTMARE PANTS?

DON'T SAY I DIDN'T WARN YOU.

I'M SORRY I EVER DOUBTED YOU.

WAIT I DON'T GET IT

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CHANCELLOR, WE MUST ATTEND TO THE MORNING BUSINESS.

OH, IF WE MUST

THE ONLY THING THAT MAKES THE DAILY TEDIUM BEARABLE IS KNOWING THAT I HAVE POWER OVER LIFE AND DEATH.

BRING IN THE NEXT BATCH OF PRISONERS, GUARD!

WHAT CHARGES HAS THE GRAND STATE OF ELF LAND BROUGHT AGAINST THESE BRUTES?

THEY STAND ACCUSED OF BEING HUMANS ON A SUNNY DAY

AND HOW DO YOU CRIMINAL SCUM PLEAD? GUILTY? OR DO YOU FEEL LIKE *LYING* TO ME TODAY?

WHOA, HOLD IT "HUMAN ON A SUNNY DAY"? HOW IS *THAT* A CRIME?!

IT'S A CRIME AGAINST NATURE AS FAR AS THE KINGDOM OF ELF IS CONCERNED, SONNY.

NATURALLY, IF YOU CAN GIVE ME EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE EVOLUTIONARY SUPERIORITY OF ROUND EARS, THEN YOU'RE FREE TO GO.

OF COURSE, SINCE WE DON'T ALLOW *FICTION* AS EVIDENCE, YOU'RE BONED

BUT IT WASN'T EVEN A SUNNY DAY WHEN YOU ARRESTED US!

ACCORDING TO THE FAIRNESS OF WEATHER ACT, THE "SUNNY DAY" LAWS ARE APPLICABLE DURING ANY AND ALL LOCAL WEATHER CONDITIONS.

THIS IS MADNESS!

NO, THIS IS THE LAW. I SENTENCE YOU TO DEATH!

ISN'T THERE AN APPELLATE COURT?

YOU COULD TRY BRIBING THE EXECUTIONER, IF YOU LIKE

BRING IN THE NEXT PRISONERS.

DOES IT WORRY ANYONE ELSE THAT NO ONE HAS COME OUT OF THAT COURT ALIVE?

YOU HAVE BEEN SUMMONED, PRISONER SCUM!

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BRING IN THE NEXT PRISONERS

I COULD *REALLY* GET USED TO THIS WHOLE ABSOLUTE POWER/CORRUPTION THING I'VE GOT GOIN' ON.

THESE CRIMINAL DOGS, STAND CHARGED WITH TRESSPASSING ELFISH TERRITORIES.

THE COURT WOULD LIKE TO NOTE HOWEVER, THAT THE ACCUSED ARE HUMANS AND THEREFORE SEVERAL LEVELS *BELOW* A LITERALLY VANDALIZING CANINE.

THE COMPARISON TO STUPID STINKY HUMANS MEANT NO ILL WILL TOWARD DOGS, CRIMINALS OR OTHERWISE.

WAIT A SECOND.

CHANCELLOR USURPER, DOCTOR MALPRACTICE! IT'S *ME!*

WHY IS THAT FAMILIAR SOUNDING VOICE NOT BEGGING FOR ITS MISERABLE LIFE?

FAMILIAR SOUNDING VOICE. ROGUE-ISH GOOD LOOKS. WEIRD BLUE ELVIS-ISH HAIR.

ARE YOU THINKING WHAT I *HOPE* YOU'RE THINKING?

PARANOID AND REACTIONARY, THAT'S THE NAME OF THE GAME.

IN ADDITION TO YOUR CRIMES AS HUMANITY, THE ELF-LOOKING HUMAN IN THE BACK WITH THE INEXPLICABLY POINTY ELF EARS GETS ONE COUNT OF ROYAL IMPERSONATION FOR LOOKING JUST LIKE THE PRINCE!

BUT I AM THE PRINCE!

GASP!

LIES! DOCTOR MALPRACTICE HAS BEEN TREATING PRINCE ELF FOR A DEBILITATING ILLNESS THAT HAS THUS FAR ELUDED ALL TREATMENTS, NO MATTER *HOW* EXPENSIVE AND OUTLANDISH THEY ARE.

IN ACCORDANCE WITH ELF LAW, I DEMAND TO SEE PROOF OF PRINCE ELF'S MEDICAL CONDITION IMMEDIATELY IF NOT SOONER.

YOUR FAMILIARITY WITH ELVEN LAW IS SUSPICIOUS

AND EVEN THOUGH THE PRINCE HASN'T RECEIVED A VISITOR OTHER THAN THE DOCTOR FOR THE DURATION OF HIS ILLNESS, I'LL ALLOW IT.

HE HAS PERSONALLY SEEN TO THE PRINCE EVERY DAY FOR THE LAST YEAR.

GASP!

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I MUST PROTEST YET AGAIN.

NOTED, DOCTOR BUT THE *HEATHENS* HAVE INVOKED ELVEN LAW

I'M NO DESPOT, DOCTOR MY CORRUPT RULE WILL BE *STRICTLY* BY THE BOOK

IT'S A FINE LINE BETWEEN POLITICAL ACUMEN AND MEGALOMANIA, AFTERALL.

WHAT WAS THAT, DOCTOR?

ER, I SAID WE'RE HERE.

PRINCE? PRINCE ELF? ARE YOU AWAKE? THERE ARE SOME VISITORS FOR YOU.

Uh, I'm not feeling very well.

PRINCE

I think they should just go away.

THAT'S WHAT I SAID, PRINCE, BUT THEY WOULD NOT LISTEN.

You always know best, doctor The Chancellor ought to give you a raise.

OH, PRINCE, YOU'RE TOO KIND THE CHANCELLOR IS A WISE RULER, SO I'M SURE HE'LL DO THE RIGHT THING.

You mean like giving you a raise *and* access to all the royal concubines?

WE'LL JUST HAVE TO SEE, MY PRINCE. WE'LL HAVE TO SEE

THERE YOU HAVE IT. NOW IF YOU'LL FOLLOW ME TO YOUR EXECUTION.

WHAT?! THAT'S JUST OR MALPRACTICE DISGUISING HIS VOICE POORLY SO WE'LL GO AWAY! HE'S BEEN AGAINST OUR GOING IN THERE FROM THE START I DEMAND TO KNOW WHAT HE'S HIDING!

WHAT SAY YOU TO THESE RIDICULOUS ACCUSATIONS DOCTOR?

COUGH! COUGH! Please take those lying prisoners away to die and rot in Liar's Hell.

ENOUGH! THE PRINCE'S IDENTITY HAS BEEN DETERMINED YOU WILL NOW BE EXECUTED.

I'M SORRY YOU FEEL THAT WAY

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GREAT WORK, THIEF. WE WEREN'T IN **NEARLY** ENOUGH TROUBLE ALREADY

YOU HAVE TO ADMIRE THE TENACITY WITH WHICH THIEF STICKS TO HIS BLUFFS.

BZZZZZZ

WHY THAT--MY BOOTS ARE **STUCK!**

IT'S GOOD OF THIEF TO VOLUNTEER US ALL FOR DEATH LIKE THIS.

Y'KNOW, I BET WE'D HAVE A CHANCE IF WE JUST HELPED OUT

ER, I GUESS, NOT SO MUCH EASIER TO JUST STAND BACK AND CRITICIZE.

HM. I DON'T KNOW HE SEEMS TO BE DOING RATHER WELL.

POW!

CRACK!

ER. **THAT** WAS UNEXPECTED

AND I THOUGHT ALL THIEVES COULD DO IN A FIGHT WAS RUN AWAY

I'LL DEAL WITH **YOU**, DOC AFTER I SHOW USURPER YOUR "PATIENT" IN THERE.

ELFLAND? MO' LIKE PANSY LAND

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PRINCE

I HAVE BEEN A FOOL.

CAN YOU FORGIVE THIS UNWORTHY CIVIL SERVANT, MY PRINCE?

YOU HAVE ALWAYS SERVED WITH COMPLETE LOYALTY TO THE ELFISH CROWN. I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT YOUR INTENT WAS ANYTHING BUT HONORABLE

THE CROWN, EH? YES, YES I THINK THAT WILL DO JUST FINE. BUT NOW FOR MORE IMMEDIATE CONCERNS.

FOR NOW THOUGH, I HAVE A FEW QUESTIONS FOR OUR DOCTOR FRIEND.

AS DO I.

WHAT DID YOU DO WITH ALL THE MONEY I'VE BEEN SENDING YOU THIS LAST YEAR?

HE TOLD **ME** HE WAS USING THOSE SIZEABLE DONATIONS FROM OUR "FOREIGN ALLIES" TO FUND THE PROHIBITIVELY EXPENSIVE TREATMENTS HE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE GIVING TO YOU, OUR "ILL" PRINCE

THE FACT THAT WE HAVE NO FOREIGN ALLIES **REALLY** SHOULD'VE TIPPED ME OFF

HOW ELSE WAS I GOING TO EXPLAIN ALL THOSE MILLIONS OF FOREIGN MINTED GIL COMING INTO OUR NATION?

HE TOLD **ME** THE MONEY WAS NEEDED TO FUND RESEARCH FOR THE CURE TO MY FATHER'S ILLNESS!

WAIT, LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT

SO THIEF IS THE ELF FORMERLY KNOWN AS PRINCE?

KILLING YOU IS GOING TO BE THE GREATEST MOMENT OF MY LIFE.

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I HAVE A PERFECTLY GOOD EXPLANATION FOR WHY I LIED TO BOTH OF YOU.

AND I CAN TELL YOU WHERE ALL THOSE MILLIONS OF GIL WENT

WE'RE LISTENING.

BUT FIRST, I'M AFRAID I HAVE TO USE THE LITTLE ELVES' ROOM.

THAT'S A REASONABLE EXCUSE.

YOU KNOW WHERE TO FIND IT, DOC.

WHY, YES. YES I DO.

HE'LL BE RIGHT BACK.

DARN IT! I KNEW SHE WOULD HAPPEN I'M FAR TOO BIG I NEED TO WEIGH IN NEGRIL AND WHO WOULD WANT TO GO

DAMMIT, I THOUGHT ELVES WERE SUPPOSED TO BE SCRAWNY TWIG BOYS!

SQUIRM!

STRUGGLE

ARGH! NOW I'M ALL TANGLED UP IN MY ROBES!

I HOPE I CAN GET UN-TANGLED BEFORE I MAKE A MESS OF THINGS.

IF I WASN'T SO BIG, THIS WOULDN'T BE A PROB-LEM.

MY STAT BONUSES ARE NOT OVER-COMPENSATION!

MY STAT BONUSES ARE NOT OVER-COMPENSATION!

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THEM?

THEY'RE HUMANS. THEY'RE OBVIOUSLY OVERCOME BY OUR ELVEN MAJESTY

BUT IT WOULD EXPLAIN MY ABYSMAL CHA STAT.

BUT IT WOULD EXPLAIN MY STABILITY ISSUES.

BUT IT WOULD EXPLAIN MY SWORD PENE-TRATION.

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YE GODS, ALL THE BLOOD IS RUSHING TO MY HEAD NOW

IT'S MAKING ME FEEL DISORIENTED.

WITH SO MUCH OF MY MASS DANGLING OUT IN FRONT LIKE THIS IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE I TOPPLE OVER!

SPLASH!

DRINK

OKAY! WE GET IT ALREADY!

MEANWHILE.

WELL, WE DO.

I'D LIKE TO BUY YOUR FASTEST HORSE FOR DOUBLE IT'S VALUE.

DONE AND DONE, SIR!

I NEED YOUR FASTEST BOAT, FAST

MOST CERTAINLY, SIR

HERE YOU ARE: ONE PASSENGER TICKET, FIRST CLASS, ONE PASSENGER TICKET, HORSE CLASS, AND THE ENTIRE CARGO BAY FOR ONE BOAT

IF I MAY SAY SO, IT SEEMS A BIT ODD TO TAKE A HORSE AND A BOAT ON AN AIRSHIP, SIR.

OH, I'M JUST RUNNING AWAY AND I AM NEVER GOING TO STOP

SEVERAL HOURS LATER.

WHEN HE GETS BACK, I ***REALLY*** NEED TO GO.

LATER THAT AFTERNOON

THE LIGHT WARRIORS, MINUS ONE, RETIRE TO A GUEST ROOM AT THE CASTLE OF ELF...

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT THIEF HAS BEEN LYING TO US ABOUT HIS PAST ALL TH.S TIME.

HARD TO BELIEVE... HAVE YOU HEARD ANY-THING THAT TWO-FACED LIAR HAS SAID SINCE YOU FIRST MET HIM? I'M STILL NOT ENTIRELY CON-VINCED HE IS THE REAL THING.

KNOWING HIM, HE COULD'VE SET UP THAT PI...OW THING **WEEKS** IN ADVANCE TO DISCREDIT THAT DOCTOR.

HE'S A LIAR AND A CHEAT

I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN, RED MAGE. THIEF HAS ALWAYS BEEN SUCH A FORTHRIGHT AND NOBLE LEADER. I MUST ADMIT, I AM SHAKEN TO MY CORE THAT SUCH AN OUTSTANDING, MORALLY UNCHALLENGED [illegible] HAVE BEEN LYING TO US

IN THE SENSE THAT HE HAS NO MORALS WITH WHICH TO BE CHALLENGED, I GUESS YOU ALMOST HAVE A POINT

HE'S ONLY ON OUR TEAM IN THE FIRST PLACE BECAUSE **SOMEONE** WAS TOO STUPID TO READ THE CONTRACT THIEF WROTE UP

TSK! WHITE MAGE SHOULD BE MORE CAREFUL

I WILL LAUGH FOR A WEEK **STRAIGHT** WHEN I FINALLY KILL YOU

MEANWHILE, IN THE ROYAL ROOM OF ROYALTY...

BLAST THAT PRINCE ELF

AND BLAST THAT ACCURSED DOCTOR!

HOW COULD I HAVE KNOWN THAT THE PRINCE TOOK IT UPON HIMSELF TO VENTURE INTO NON-ELF LANDS TO SEEK A FORTUNE TO HELP FIND A CURE FOR THE MYSTERIOUS ILL-NESS THAT HAD BEFALLEN HIS FATHER? IT SEEMS ONLY DR. MAL-PRACTICE KNEW OF THE PRINCE'S INTENTIONS. THE DOCTOR THEN FAKED THE PRINCE'S ILLNESS SO I WOULD BRIBE HIM TO MAKE SURE THAT THE PRINCE NEVER RECOVERED SO I COULD TAKE OVER ELFLAND WITH A BLOODLESS COUP!

AND ALL THE WHILE HE WAS PUTTING THE PRINCE'S ILL-GOTTEN GAINS INTO HIS **OWN** BANK ACCOUNT! THAT BLASTED DOCTOR PLAYED US BOTH FOR FOOLS AND MADE A **FORTUNE**. MEANWHILE, I'M STUCK WITH THE RIGHTFUL HEIR TO THE THRONE A MERE **TWO** DAYS BEFORE I WAS SLATED TO TAKE OVER! IF ONLY I COULD **DISPOSE** OF HIM IN SOME CONVENIENT AND UNTRACEABLE MANNER. AH, HERE HE COMES NOW...

EXCUSE ME, CHANCE...OR I DIDN'T MEAN TO INTERRUPT YOUR INNER MONOLOGUE TO WHICH I AM NOT PRIVY

I HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT THE ROYAL CROWN OF ROYALTY

OF COURSE. THE CROWN!

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AH, YES! THE ROYAL CROWN OF ROYALTY, THE VERY MANTLE OF LEADERSHIP FOR OUR PEOPLE WITHOUT WHICH THE ROYAL FAMILY HAS NO POWER TO RULE.

WHAT OF IT?

WELL, I CAN'T SEEM TO FIND IT

I WAS AFRAID SOMETHING LIKE THIS WAS GOING TO HAPPEN.

IT WOULD APPEAR THE TREACHERY OF DR. MALPRACTICE HAS STABBED ELFLAND TO THE SOURCE OF THE CORE OF THE HEART OF OUR LAND'S ELFY GOODNESS.

WHILE YOU WERE GONE, HE JUST HAVE STOLEN AWAY IN THE NIGHT WITH THE ROYAL CROWN OF ROYALTY.

SOME SAY HE TOSSED IT INTO THE DEPTHS OF MARSH CAVE

OTHERS CLAIM I DID IT ONE NIGHT LAST WEEK.

CO-INCIDENTALLY, THEY WERE PUT TO DEATH FOR CRIMES AGAINST THE STATE

ONE THING IS FOR SURE THE CROWN IS DEFINITELY IN MARSH CAVE. I BLAME MYSELF!

BUT NOT IN ANY CONCRETE LEGALLY BINDING WAY THAT DIRECTLY IMPLICATES ME AS THE ACTUAL PERSON OR PERSONS WHO PHYSICALLY PUT THE CROWN INTO MARSH CAVE

I'M SPEAKING STRICTLY IN ABSTRACT TERMS BROUGHT UPON BY FEELINGS OF GUILT

NATURALLY

IN THE MEANTIME THOUGH, HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO GET THE ROYAL CROWN?

THE CAVE OF MARSH HAS LONG BEEN A HELLISH *BOIL* UPON OUR LANDS. ITS HORRORS ARE *NOT* FOR THOSE OF MORTAL STATURE. TRULY, SOME SAY ONLY A GROUP OF *DESTINED HEROES* COULD PLUMB ITS DEPTHS AND LIVE TO TELL THE TALE. OTHERS MIGHT SAY I MADE THAT PART UP JUST NOW, BUT THEY'D BE PUT TO DEATH IN A [illegible] IF THEY DID.

IF *ONLY* THERE WAS A GROUP OF FOREIGN DEVILS WHOSE VIOLENT DEATHS IN MARSH CAVE WOULD NOT BE QUESTIONED

AND IF *ONLY* THERE WAS AN ERRANT PRINCE WHOM THE ELFISH PUBLIC HAD NOT YET LEARNED OF TO LEAD THEM.

ALAS. THERE IS NO HOPE

WAIT! I KNOW OF JUST SUCH A GROUP!

YOU DON'T SAY!

AND THEY'LL FOLLOW ME INTO THE PITS OF HELL ITSELF, OR ELSE SUFFER THE WRATH OF MY *CONTRACT*

SO WHEN THIEF COMES BACK, WE *STAB* 'EM!

WHY IS THAT YOUR SOLUTION FOR EVERYTHING?

I GO WITH WHAT WORKS.

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THEN WE'RE IN AGREEMENT WHEN THIEF WALKS IN HERE, WE KILL HIM AND THROW OFF HIS CONTRACTUAL BONDS.

BUT I *LIKE* THIEF

YEAH, HE GAVE ME SOME CANDY.

MIND YOU, IT COST ME MY SHARE OF OUR TREASURE. BUT IT WAS *REALLY* GOOD CANDY.

YOU GAVE UP ALL RIGHTS TO YOUR TREASURE FOR ONE PIECE OF CANDY!?

OH, *NO*. TECHNICALLY, SINCE YOU ALREADY SIGNED AWAY MY SHARE OF TREASURE, I HAD TO GIVE HIM *YOUR* SHARE.

BUT SINCE YOU ALREADY GAVE HIM THAT TOO, I SIGNED OVER YOUR LIFELONG DEVOTION TO THIEF!

WHAT THE! *MY* LIFELONG DEVOTION!? WHAT THE FUG ABOUT *YOURS*!

FOR *CANDY*? IT WAS ONLY ONE PIECE. I'M NOT AN IDIOT.

GUYS! I'VE GOT A *VERY* IMPORTANT ISSUE TO DISCUSS WITH YOU.

BUT FIRST I MUST CLOSE THIS DOOR, THUS BARING MY VULNERABLE BACK TO YOU.

I *WANT* TO BE SURPRISED BY THAT, BUT I CAN'T BE

IT'S WHAT HE WOULD HAVE WANTED.. IF HE WAS ME.

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ER, SHOULDN'T WE HEAL HIM?

ANYWAY, YOU WERE GOING TO SAY SOME-THING?

ER, YEAH.

I KNOW WE CAME HERE LOOKING FOR MATOYA'S CRYSTAL, BUT THERE'S BEEN A CHANGE OF PLAN.

I'LL STILL HELP YOU GUYS FIND IT, IT'S IN MY OWN BEST INTERESTS NOT TO BE ***RAVAGED*** BY HELLISH MINDBENDING NIGHTMARES FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE.

BUT YOU'VE GOT TO HELP ME WITH SOMETHING FIRST

GOT TO? ***GOT*** TO? WE DON'T ***GOT*** TO DO ANYTHING FOR YOU.

I THINK HE'S RECOVER-

CRUNCH

I DON'T WANT TO GET BOGGED DOWN IN TECHNICALITIES, BUT...

TECH-NICALLY, YES, YOU DO

I SHOULDN'T HAVE GIVEN FIGHTER MY POWER OF ATTORNEY

NOT... QUITE DEAD

THWIP!

YOU REALLY HAVE NO ONE TO BLAME BUT YOURSELF, Y'KNOW

YEAH, WELL...

HE'S GOING TO MAKE IT!

THERE, PROBLEM SOLVED

OH, NO, NO, HE'S DEAD AGAIN.

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SO WHAT IS IT WE *HAVE* TO DO FOR YOU, OH PRINCELY PRINCE?

FIRST OF ALL, YOU WON'T REFER TO ME AS "PRINCE", YOU WILL REFER TO ME AS *THIEF*

YOU GOT IT, PRINCE!

GRR

TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTION, WE MUST EMBARK ON A HARROWING MISSION INTO THE MOUTH OF HELL ITSELF THEY SAY.

BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH!

YOU ARE MISSING THE ALL TOO IMPORTANT POINT

IS THERE CONSIDERABLE EXPERIENCE TO BE EARNED AND POWERFUL MAGICAL ITEMS TO BE CLAIMED?

WELL, CONSIDERING THAT ALL THOSE WHO ENTER, DIE..

...I'M SURE THE SLAIN AND ROTTED BODIES OF *MANY* A HERO MUST LITTER THE MARSH CAVE.

THERE'S BOUND TO BE AN ITEM OF POWER OR TWO AMONGST THOSE REKNOWNED CORPSES.

EVERY PART OF THAT GRISLY TALE APPEALS TO ME

BLACK MAGE?

HM, CERTAIN DEATH OR NO. LET ME THINK ABOUT THIS FOR A MIN--*NO*

AH, WHAT WE HAVE HERE IS A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE THIS WASN'T ANYTHING LIKE A REQUEST SO MUCH AS IT WAS A STATEMENT OF CERTAIN *CONTRACTUAL* INEVITABILITIES.

BAH! I'M TIRED OF YOUR EMPTY CONTRACTUAL THREATS.

WHAT COULD YOU THREATEN ME WITH THAT I COULDN'T STAB AND/OR BLAST MY WAY OUT OF?

FOR STARTERS, THERE'S..

Ettul, Alda Ohta-kyato

MY ELITE ROYAL SQUAD OF LAW-NINJA.

HE MAKES A GOOD CASE

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HOLD IT! HOW DO WE KNOW THESE "LAWNINJA" OF YOURS ACTUALLY POSE A THREAT?

WE COULD STEALTH SUE YOU

I'D LOVE TO SEE YOU TRY

WE MAGES ARE EXTRASENSORY BEINGS OUT OF NECESSITY WE LIVE IN A WORLD OF COMPLEX HYPERDIMENSIONAL INPUTS THAT WOULD SCRAMBLE SIMPLER MINDS, I.E. ***YOURS***, FASTER THAN YOU COULD CAST A CARD TRICK.

OH, I'M SURE YOUR CUTE GYMNASTICS ROUTINES AND CHILDISH SMOKE-BOMBS AND RED PAJAMAS WITH FEET ARE EFFECTIVE IN THEIR OWN, SPECIAL, LITTLE WAYS.

BUT YOU'RE OUT OF YOUR LEAGUE HERE. FORCES YOU CAN'T EVEN ***PRONOUNCE***, MUCH LESS ***UNDERSTAND***, ARE AT ***MY*** BECK AND CALL.

BLAH BLAH BLAH... HEREBY SUMMONED TO APPEAR AT THE COURT OF ELF... BLAH.

YOU CONTINUE TO BREATHE ***ONLY*** BECAUSE YOUR EXISTENCE IS AMUSING TO ME.

SNATCH!

HEY!

YOU CAN'T SUE ME FOR BEING "A STUPID SMELLY JERK"!

CAN'T I?

ALL RIGHT, ***FINE*** CALL OFF YOUR GOON SQUAD, GOONY WE'LL GO WITH YOU TO STUPID MARSH CAVE.

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I'M GLAD YOU SAW MY SIDE OF IT

YOU'D BE SURPRISED WHAT A PLATOON OF HEARTLESS NINJA LAWYERS CAN DO IN FAVOR OF A POSITION

WE'LL HAVE TO FIND A CLINIC TO HEAL FIGHTER, OF COURSE

I WOULDN'T DARE BRAVE THE HELL OF MARSH CAVE WITHOUT A MEAT SHIELD TO PARADE AT THE FRONT OF THE GROUP

WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH RED MAGE?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

THAT'S THE FIRST PRACTICAL LINE OF THINKING TO COME OUT OF YOUR WORD HOLE SINCE WE FIRST MET

MY PLANS ARE ALWAYS PRACTICAL! IT'S THE LAWS OF PHYSICS THAT GET IN THE WAY OF MY SUCCESS!

THIEF, TELL RED MAGE THAT I AM OFFICIALLY IGNORING HIM UNTIL HE STOPS ACTING LIKE A WIZARD WITH HIS STAFF STUFFED UP HIS DARK DIMENSION.

YOUR CHILDISH ANTICS ASIDE, HE'S RIGHT WE DO NEED TO FIND A WAY TO HEAL FIGHTER

PHOOEY.

TOLD YA.

OH, COME ON. WE DON'T SPECIFICALLY NEED FIGHTER, PER SE

ANY OUT PATIENT FROM THE LOBOTOMY WARD WITH A SWORD CAN DO HIS JOB AND WITHOUT THE STABBITY-CAUSING COMMENTS, TOO.

BE THAT AS IT MAY, HE IS ALREADY A VALUABLE MEMBER OF OUR TEAM.

AND HE'LL BE ***TWICE*** AS VALUABLE IF HE DIES IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE

HIS INSURANCE PAYS OFF ***DOUBLE*** IN CASE OF DEATH BY HEROIC ACT.

HUG.

ARE WE GOING TO HEAL THIS ***OTHER*** GUY NAMED FIGHTER, OR NOT?

WHAT DID I EVER DO TO DESERVE THIS AS MY FATE?

OTHER THAN ALL THE SINNING.

FIGHTER!

YAY!

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FIGHTER! I'M GLAD YOU SURVIVED!

AS AM I. THE PRICES THEY CHARGE AT THOSE CLINICS IS ABSURD

AWW SHUCKS, GUYS.

TWEREN'T NUTHIN'. BM ONLY STABBED ME TWICE AND WITH HIS WEAK LITTLE WIZARD'S WRISTS, THAT'S HARDLY ANYTHING AT ALL

WHAT ABOUT THE SUBSEQUENT FORTY-SEVEN STAB WOUNDS YOU SUFFERED IMMEDIATELY AFTERWARD?

WHAT FORTY-SEVEN?

5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45

TOO. EXHAUSTED TO DELIVER... FINAL TWO STABBINGS... FEEL FREE TO INDULGE YOURSELVES.

WHEEZE

PANT

ASTHMA

WOW! BLACK MAGE MANAGED TO BURST EVERY KETCHUP PACKET I WAS HOLDING FOR RM'S PREMATURELY ABORTED DRAGON BAIT PLAN!

MY PRECIOUS DRAGON-BAIT!

THAT STUFF'S HARD TO FIND UNLESS YOU GO TO A RESTAURANT! JERK

IF I HAD THE STRENGTH, I WOULD CRY

DON'T LET THIS HAPPEN TO *YOU!*

A MESSAGE FROM THE KETCHUP CONSERVATION SOCIETY

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AND SO THE LIGHT WARRIORS WENT TO MARSH CAVE IN SEARCH OF THE ELFISH ROYAL CROWN OF ROYALTY, THE VERY LIVING MANTLE OF LEADERSHIP THROUGHOUT THE KINGDOM OF ELF

W THOUT THE ROYAL CROWN THERE WAS NO ROYAL HOUSE TO DOM NATE THE THRONE A BRUTAL C VIL WAR BETWEEN THE ESTABLISHED RULING CLAN OF KHEE'BLER AND THE MIGHTY CLAN OF SAHN'TA WOULD BE THE ONLY VIABLE COURSE OF ACTION.

SUCH A CONFLICT FOR RULER-SHIP WOULD SURELY TAKE A HORRIBLE TOLL ON THE C TIZENS OF ELF LAND MERE PAWNS IN A GAME OF POWER AND WEALTH ON A SCALE THEY COULD SCARCELY UNDERSTAND.

PRINCE ELF KNOWS TH S. HE KNOWS THAT THE CROWN IS THE ONLY WAY TO ENSURE THE FATE OF H S FAMILY BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, IT IS THE ONLY WAY TO ENSURE PEACE FOR THE PEOPLE OF ELF.

AND SO HE QUESTS FOR THE CROWN THOUGH IT IS LOST TO THE DEPTHS OF HELL ITSELF MARSH CAVE. A FESTER NG PORTAL INTO THE REALM OF THE DAMNED

NONE WHO ENTER RETURN THE PRINCE'S FATE S SEALED AND WITH IT THE FATE OF ELFLAND FOR TRULY, THOUGH THERE CAN BE NO ROYAL HOUSE WITHOUT THE CROWN, THERE IS NOTH NG IN THE SACRED TEXTS THAT SAYS AN AMBITIOUS CHANCELLOR CAN'T RULE WITHOUT IT

WOW THAT'S DOWN-RIGHT DIABOLICAL, CHANCELLOR USURPER

YES, I KNOW. THAT'S WHAT 90% OF CHAN-CELLORING IS ALL ABOUT WHEN YOU GET DOWN TO IT

I'LL BE SURE TO KEEP THAT IN MIND [redacted].

OH, I WOULDN'T BOTHER

I JUST WANTED SOME-ONE TO APPRECIATE MY EVIL GENIUS. OF COURSE, WE CAN'T ACTUALLY HAVE YOU RUNNING AROUND KNOWING THESE THINGS.

BUT... WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? I'M YOUR FAITHFUL AND LOYAL ASSIS-TANT!

YES. AND AS SUCH YOU'LL BECOME THE CHANCE...OR WHEN I ASCEND TO THE THRONE

AS I HAVE PROVEN WITH MY OWN ACTIONS, CHANCELLORS CANNOT BE TRUSTED THINK OF THIS AS A PRE-EMPTIVE EXECUTION

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THIS ISN'T SO BAD.

YEAH. OTHER THAN THE ABHORRENT LIGHT OF DAY, AND ALL THE HAPPY DENIZENS OF THE FOREST, AND YOU GUYS, THIS TREK IS JUST ABOUT TOLERABLE.

I HOPE WE DO FIND HELL SO I CAN TEAM UP WITH CHAOS AND KILL YOU WOULD-BE HEROES.

SO. ARE WE THERE YET?

YEAH. I WANT SOME OF THAT DELICIOUS EXPERIENCE I WAS PROMISED

I ALREADY CALCULATED THE MOST EFFICIENT PLACEMENT OF MY UPCOMING SKILL POINTS IN MY HEAD.

I DEMAND ACTION!

I MEAN, WE'VE BEEN WALKING THROUGH THIS FOREST FOR HOURS. WHERE'S THE LEGIONS OF HELL AND SLAIN HEROES AND SO ON?

THEREFORE, YOU WILL NOT FIND CORPSES IN VARIOUS STAGES OF DECAY WITH GIANT CHUNKS MISSING FROM THEIR BODIES.

BUT THOSE HAVE BEEN HUNTED TO NEAR EXTINCTION IN RECENT YEARS.

FIRST OF ALL, THIS IS JUST THE FOREST OF TREES.

PICTURESQUE FOREST OF TREES, THANK YOU.

THE POINT IS THAT IT'S NOT MARSH CAVE.

ABOUT THE WORST THING YOU'LL FIND IN THE *PICTURESQUE* FOREST OF TREES IS THE ODD GIANT SPIDER.

GIANT SPIDERS FOR THE PRESERVATION OF GIANT SPIDERS

JERKS.

NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT, THE GIANT SPIDERS STARTED TO DIE OUT AROUND THE SAME TIME THE SO-CALLED "DARK ELF" CULT WAS DISCOVERED AND ROUTED BY THE GOVERNMENT

BUT NO ONE'S SEEN A DARK ELF IN GENERATIONS, SO I SERIOUSLY DOUBT WE HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT [illegible].

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SEE HOW THE GRASS IS STAMPED DOWN HERE AND HERE?

YES.

THAT INDICATES THAT THEY WERE HAVING AN ARGUMENT

YOU CAN REALLY TELL THAT JUST FROM THEIR TRACKS?

NO. BUT YOU HAVE TO ADMIT, I'M PROBABLY RIGHT

CAN'T YOU BE SERIOUS FOR ONCE? WE'VE LOST THE WARRIORS OF LIGHT, WE'RE MILES DEEP IN HOSTILE ELVEN TERRITORY, AND YOU'RE LEADING THE WAY SO I CAN ONLY ASSUME WE'RE LOST!

HMM...

"HMM" WHAT? WHAT IS THERE TO "HMM" ABOUT, BB?

WELL, IT'S JUST THAT THE TRACKS WE'VE BEEN FOLLOWING ABRUPTLY END HERE AND, ER...

THEY'RE SORTA RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE TRACKS OF A PACK OF GIANT SPIDERS.

THEY DON'T LEAD ANYWHERE, SO THE SPIDERS PROBABLY AMBUSHED THEM FROM THE TREES AND RETIRED THERE IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE ATTACK

THE LACK OF BODIES INDICATES THEY WERE EITHER EATEN WHOLE HERE OR BROUGHT ALONG.

LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT

YOU'RE TELLING ME THEIR MOST OPTIMISTIC FATE IS THAT THEY'VE BEEN KIDNAPPED BY GIANT SPIDERS.

AND THEY TOOK THEM TO SOME SECRET LOCALE WHICH WE HAVE NO HOPE OF EVER FINDING.

YUP!

THIS NEWS DOES NOT INSTILL ME WITH A GREAT DEAL OF CONFIDENCE.

HOW ARE WE GOING TO FIND THEM?

WHAT ABOUT THAT FATE STUFF? I'M SURE SOMETHING WILL TURN UP

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Y'KNOW IT'S INTERESTING YOU SAID THERE WEREN'T ANY GIANT SPIDERS AND YET

I COULDN'T HELP BUT NOTICE THAT WE'VE BEEN CAPTURED BY GIANT SPIDERS

YOUR SARCASM WILL NOT GET US OUT OF HERE ANY FASTER

PERHAPS BUT I THINK WHAT'S HURTING US THE MOST RIGHT NOW IF YOU DON'T MIND MY SAYING SO IS THAT YOU GOT US CAPTURED IN THE FIRST PLACE, THIEF

THIEF'S RIGHT PLAYING THE BLAME GAME WON'T HELP

OH BUT ONE QUICK ROUND WON'T HURT. WATCH IT'S THIEF'S FAULT I WIN

ITS SUPA FUNNY

NO, RM I MEAN IT'S KINDA FUNNY THAT VARGUS, MY ZODIAC KENSHIDO MENTOR, TAUGHT ME EXACTLY HOW TO GET OUT OF STUFF LIKE THIS

HE ALWAYS SAID THAT IF YOU GET TIED UP YOU SHOULD USE YOUR HEAD TO GET YOUR SHOULDERS AND FREE YOURSELF

TRULY VARGUS WAS A CREDIT TO HIS CRETINOUS CLASS

DID HE HAPPEN TO SAY ANYTHING ABOUT HOW TO FREE YOURSELF FROM BONDS THAT RESTRICTED ACCESS TO YOUR SWORD?

OF COURSE! THE LESSON THAT COVERED THAT TECHNIQUE WAS PART OF MY DAILY ROUTINE IT WENT

"SASHIME, STOP WATCHING TV AND PAY A LITTLE ATTENTION FOR JUST ONE DAMNED MINUTE. NOW THEN, SOMETHING SOMETHING, SOMETHING, SOMETHING, SOMETHING, SOMETHING. LET'S SEE YOU TRY—WERE YOU EVEN PAYING ATTENTION?"

HEH I WAS STILL WATCHIN' TV SUCKER!

IF I COULD MOVE MY ARMS, I COULD GIVE MYSELF AN ESCAPE ABILITY

IF I COULD MOVE MY ARMS WE'D BE DOWN TO ONE-QUARTER OUR STAFF

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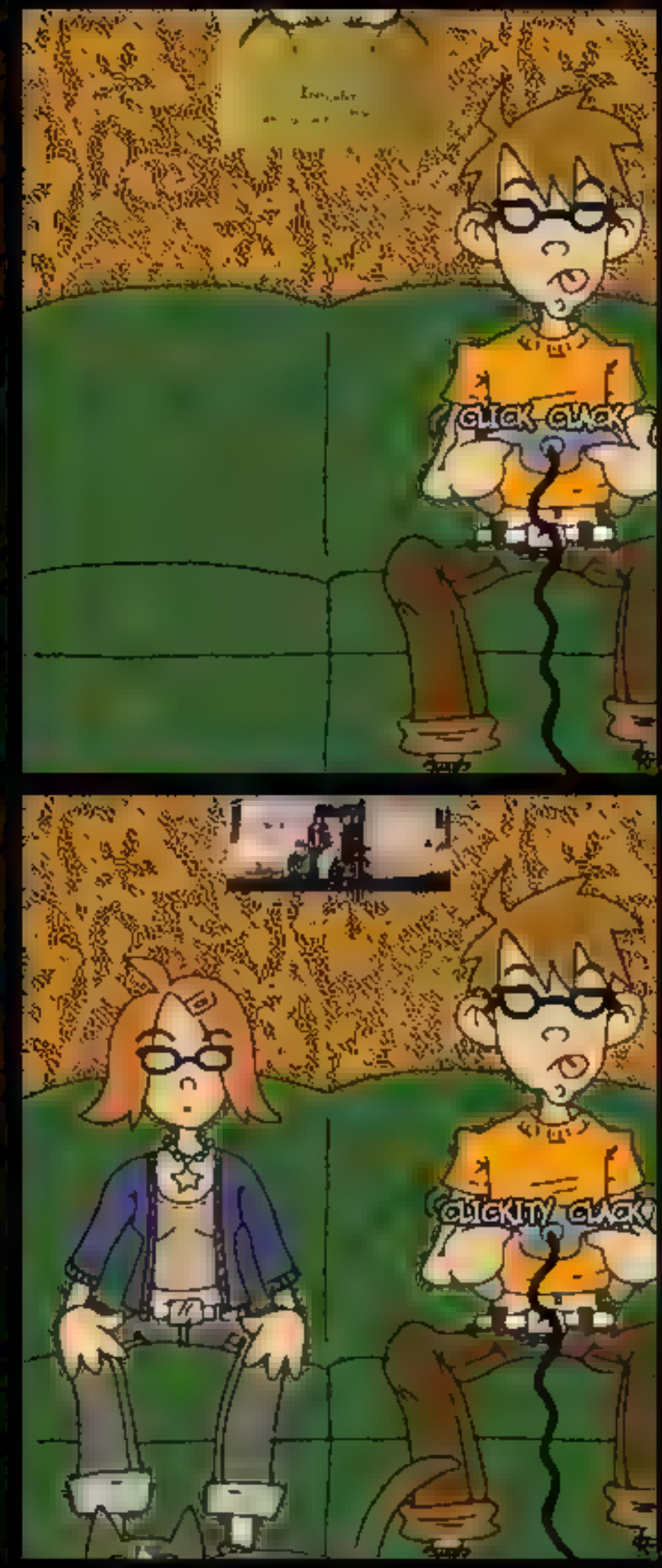
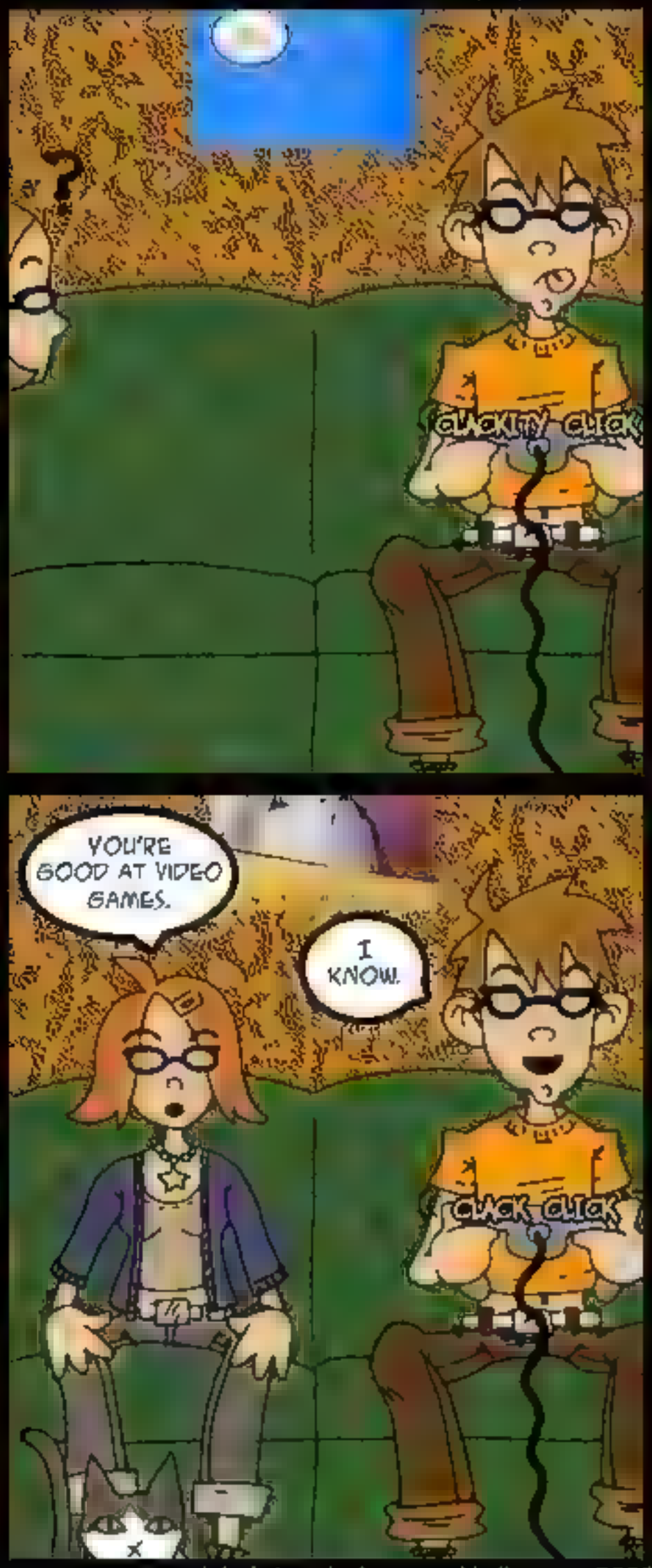
brian theater

track 1 - i throw my toys around





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DUM DUM, I LOVE BIG SPIDERS AND I CANNOT LIE, YOU OTHER SUCKAS CAN'T DENY... DUM DOO DUM...

DOO DA, SHAKE IT, SHAKE IT, SHAKE IT, SHAKE IT, SHAKE THAT HEALTHY THORAX, DA DOO...

THERE HE GOES AGAIN! THIS IS A CAVE OF GIANT DOOM SPIDERS! WHY IS THAT GUY WALKING AROUND LIKE HE OWNS THE PLACE? HE'S NO GIANT SPIDER.

WHOAH! CHECK OUT THE BIG BRAIN ON DR. STRAW-HAT.

I HOPE BATMAN'S GOT JOB INSURANCE, 'CAUSE THERE'S A NEW DETECTIVE ON THE PROWL!

AND HIS NAME IS CAPTAIN OBVIOUS! WHICH IS YOU.

I DON'T LIKE MEDDLING IN AFFAIRS I CAN'T PERCEIVE, BUT THAT WAS REALLY LAME.

DR. STRAW-HAT BATMAN, DETECTIVE, CAPTAIN OBVIOUS. YOU'RE ALL OVER THE PLACE. FOCUS, MAN. FOCUS.

WHOAH! LOOK OUT, CAPTAIN OBVIOUS! THERE'S A NEW... UM...

A NEW STATING THE OVERTLY APPARENT...

...MAN.

HERE. RIGHT NOW.

SO, BE CAREFUL! FOR YOUR STATUS AS OBVIOUS-TALKING-GUY IS IN DANGER OVER THERE. HA!

I JUST HAD A HORRIBLE THOUGHT. THOSE SPIDERS ARE PROBABLY THIS GUY'S MINIONS

THIS GUY IS DUMBER THAN GARLAND BUT HE'S HOLDING US AS PRISONERS

THAT BEGS THE QUESTION: WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH US?

I BLAME THE OVERALL LACK OF SWORDSMANSHIP

AND THIEVERY

PLUS YOU GUYS KNOW ABSOLUTELY NOTHING ABOUT PROPER STAT PLACEMENT

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elite

WEEEEEEE!

HA!

TURN

FIGHT
FIGHT
STRIKE

CRASH

AUGH!

ANYWAY CUT ME DOWN WHILE THIEF AND RED MAGE HAVE DRIZZ'L DISTRACTED

SLICE!

DONE

THANKS. MIND IF I "TAKE CARE" OF THOSE STAMPS?

OH, PLEASE DO.

EXCELLENT

NO PROBLEM.

MUCH BETTER, BM. THANKS.

SO WHAT HAPPENED TO THAT SPIDER ANYWAY?

ER, I'M NOT SURE. IT MUST'VE FALLEN OFF WHILE I WAS RUNNING AROUND IDIOTICALLY

THE UNIVERSE HAS A WAY OF RESOLVING ITSELF WHEN IT COMES TO THINGS LIKE THAT, SO I'M SURE THERE'S NO NEED TO WORRY

I CAN'T FEEL MY LEGS!

YOU'RE PROBABLY RIGHT

BUT WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT DRIZZ'L?

WELL, WE *COULD* JUST LEAVE RM AND THIEF TO DEAL WITH H.M.

HE'S A PRETTY GOOD SWORDSMAN. I'M NOT SURE HOW LONG THEY COULD LAST

AND I'M SURE I DON'T CARE SO IT ALL WORKS OUT, SEE

IT DOESN'T SOUND TOO EVIL WHEN *YOU* SAY IT

THAT'S BECAUSE I'M USING HYPNO-VISION.

WHAT?

I SAID NOTHING.

I COULD'VE SWORN YOU SAID SOMETHING ABOUT HYPNOVISION, THE USE OF WHICH ON ME WOULD BE SILLY SINCE I'M NOT SMART ENOUGH TO BE EFFECTED BY IT.

WE'RE SILLY.

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LEAP!

Citizen MAGE

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.. WITH ONE PURPOSE ONLY, TO POINT OUT AND MAKE *PUBLIC* THE DISHONESTY, DOWNRIGHT VILLANY OF BOSS JIM W. GARLAND'S POLITICAL MACHINE NOW IN COMPLETE CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THIS STATE

I MADE NO CAMPAIGN PROMISES BECAUSE UNTIL A FEW WEEKS AGO I HAD *NO HOPE* OF RULING THE WORLD NOW, HOWEVER, I HAVE SOMETHING *MORE* THAN A HOPE

AND J.M. GARLAND HAS SOMETHING LESS THAN A *CHANCE*. EVERY STRAW VOTE, EVERY INDEPENDENT POLL SHOWS THAT I WILL BE ELECTED!

VERY WELL, THEN, NOW I CAN *AFFORD* TO MAKE SOME PROMISES. THE NOBLE MAN AND THE SNOTTY SPOILED CHILD KNOW THAT THEY CAN EXPECT MY *BEST EFFORTS* IN THEIR INTERESTS

DECENT, ELITE CITIZENS KNOW THAT I'LL DO EVERYTHING IN MY POWER TO *DESTROY* THE UNDERPRIVILEGED, THE UNDERPAID, AND THE UNDERFED.

MOTHER, IS POP HIGH WORLORD YET?

NOT YET, JUNIOR.

WELL, I'D MAKE MY PROMISES NOW IF I WEREN'T TOO BUSY ARRANGING TO *KEEP* THEM. HERE'S ONE PROMISE I'LL MAKE AND BOSS J.M. GARLAND *KNOWS* I'LL KEEP IT. MY FIRST OFFICIAL ACT AS HIGH WARLORD OF THIS WORLD WILL BE TO APPOINT SPECIAL DISTRICT *IMPS* TO ARRANGE FOR THE INDICTMENT, PROSECUTION AND *CONVICTION* OF BOSS JIM W. GARLAND!

CURSES!

BAD DUDES
Bad Dudes Copyright Data East
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HOLY PUBLICITY OPPURTUNITY, BATMAN! BRIAN CLEVINGER IS HAVING GUEST COMICS, AGAIN!!!

I'M ON IT, ROBIN!

AWAY!!!

I'LL, UH. SIT HERE AND DEAL WITH MY FEAR OF OF ABANDONMENT, THEN

ORO PRESENTS...

MYSTERY 8-BIT THEATER 3000!

STARRING MIKE, TOM SERVO, AND GROOOOOOW!

CUZ EVERYONE LOVES SARCASTIC ROBOTS!

I DON'T

ERE WE WERE.

GRANT'S EAR' BECAUSE THAT WAS THE STYLE AT THE TIME

WOW, THIS IS LIKE THE 80TH SIMPSONS REFERENCE!

GRANT'S EAR²

AND IT'S JUST EPISODE 20!

RE THEM THEN FIRST S.

T TH OT STEVE THE MMONER USED OOR FROM THE

I GET IT! BLACK MAGE IS EVIL!

OK ORPHANAGE

BUT HE'S LOVABLY EVIL!

FIRE-3 TO CH THE BUILDING THEN PICK OFF AN URVIVORS WITH BOLT SET TO A WIDE DISPERSAL

LOOK! THIEF IS BEING GREEDY AGAIN!

I HEAR BILL GATES IS PLAYING HIM IN THE MOVIE..

BILBO OF THE GATESPEOPLE

SWORD-CHUCKS, YO!

GOOD! NOW BRIAN CAN STOP THINKING UP NEW JOKES!

OH THAT'S JUST MEAN

WAIT! WE HAVEN'T DONE THE THING WHERE WE STARE AT EACHOTHER AND NOT SAY ANYTHING YET !

RIGHT!!!

BRIAN, YOU MAKE A COMIC THIS LONG HOW MANY TIMES A WEEK??? AND APOLOGIES TO BRIAN AND ALL OF HIS OFFENDED FANS FOR THE SARCASM CONTAINED WITHIN THIS STRIP

GUEST COMIC FOR 8-BIT THEATER BY MANNY O'DONNELL

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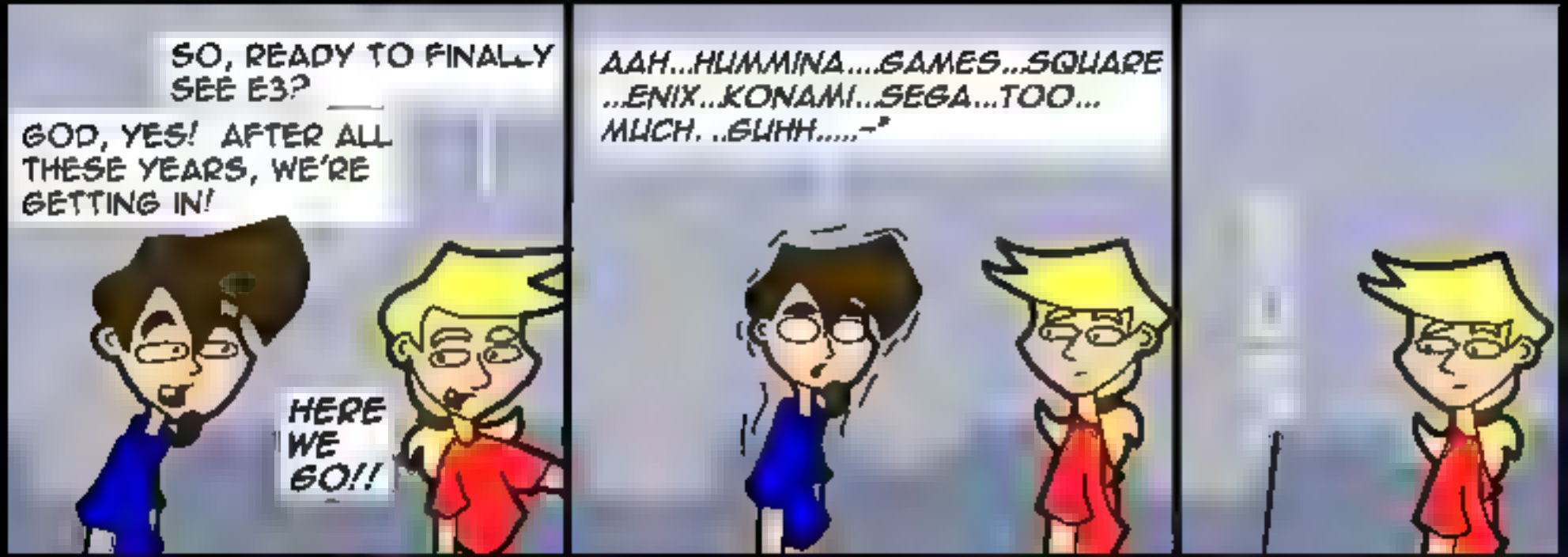
Guest strip by Michael "Mookie" Terracciano
http://dominicdeegan.keenspace.com

#48: I WOULDN'T HANDLE E3 WELL



(C) STU LIVING 2003

Where are they now?

OUR BELOVED LIGHT WARRIORS, QUESTING TO SAVE THE WORLD...

BUT AFTER TEN YEARS, OUR HEROES HAVE CHANGED. HOW SO? LET'S FIND OUT!

AFTER INHERITING THE "VARGUS' FIGHTER DAY CAMP KENSHIDO ACADEMY", FIGHTER BEGAN TO TRAIN A NEW GENERATION OF WARRIORS.

BLACK MAGE CONTINUED HIS RELENTLESS MAGICAL STUDY AND LEARNED THE MOST POWERFUL SPELL OF ALL TIME. HE USED IT ON FRANCE.

AFTER REALIZING THE ERROR OF HIS WAYS, THEIF GAVE HIS VAST PERSONAL FORTUNE TO POOR PEOPLE AND ORPHANS.

RED MAGE GAVE HIMSELF A +20 IN KNOWLEDGE: BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AND PROCEEDED TO BECOME C.E.O. OF WIZARDS OF THE COAST

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BRIAN'S BASEMENT
YOU FOUND A OUTLET

WELL, WELL, WELL... IF IT ISN'T SEXY MAGE AND *DUMB* BELT

OH YE *GODS.*

JUST GET US DOWN!

SO, YOU COME HERE OFTEN OR--

OH, WE'LL CUT YOU DOWN ALL RIGHT BE MOST ASSURED OF *THAT*, MY DEAR.

HOWEVER, SUCH SERVICE DOES NOT COME WITHOUT ITS PRICE.

OH NO.

SHOULD WE ASSIST YOU IN THIS MOST DIRE TIME OF NEED, YOUR DEBT TO US, AND BY "US" I OF COURSE MEAN ME, WOULD BE BEST MEASURED IN A SCALE USUALLY RESERVED FOR THE SCIENCE OF ASTRONOMY

UNDER ORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES, MERELY ***CALCULATING*** A DEBT OF THIS SIZE WOULD BE AN EPIC QUEST OF MATHE-MATICS IN AND OF ITSELF.

BUT, AS CHANCE WOULD HAVE IT, I'VE BEEN THINKING AT ***GREAT*** LENGTHS ABOUT WHAT IT IS EXACTLY THAT I WANT FROM YOU.

SUCH THOUGHTS OFTEN TURNED TO LAMENTATIONS SINCE I POSSESSED NO MEANS BY WHICH I COULD ATTAIN WHAT IT WAS THAT I DESIRED

BUT NOW, ***NOW*** THAT HAS ALL CHANGED YOU WILL OWE ME YOUR LIFE, AND IN EXCHANGE YOU WILL--HEY!

THANK YOU FOR CUTTING US LOOSE.

THINK NOTHING OF IT

I BELIEVE IN EXPLOITING DEBTS, NOT HAVING THEM. SO LET'S CALL IT EVEN.

THOUGH I MUST ADMIT A CERTAIN DIFFICULTY IN COMING AWAY FROM A TRANSACTION WITH-OUT AN OBSCENE PROFIT

I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU'D ***GET MAGICAL*** WITH ME ANY-WAY

I WOULD RATHER DIE

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I WONDER HOW WHITE MAGE AND BLACK BELT MADE OUT

NEVER USE THAT PHRASE

MEANWHILE, IN THE NEXT ROOM.

WHAT WAS ALL THAT RACKET?

SORRY. THAT WAS THIS NINJA'S BATTLECRY OR WAS IT *THAT* NINJA?

IT'S A LITTLE HARD TO TELL NOW THAT THEY HAVE BEEN BEATEN TO DEATH WITH THEIR OWN LIMBS.

WELL, DON'T STAY UP TOO LONG. WE'VE GOT AN EARLY DAY TOMOR-ROW

THAT'S A NO DESSERT ATTITUDE IF I *EVER* SAW ONE.

YES, *MOM!*

AWW, GEE!

LOOKS LIKE EVERYTHING WORKED OUT FOR THE BEST THEN.

YUP NO LOOSE STRINGS HERE JUST PERFECTLY PLAUSIBLE STUNT DUMMIES FILLED WITH REALISTIC BLOOD LEFT OUT IN THE WOODS.

NO-THIN' WEIRD OR UNEXPLAINED ABOUT THAT NO SIR

MOM? DAD? SIS? FELLOW?

WHAT THE..?

To whomsoever may miss that family of campers.

At least they will always live in your memory.

P.S. But since everyone knows that's not really living, it may be more accurate to say they are very, and forever, dead.

-Black Mage

PHASE ONE COMPLETE. TIME FOR PHASE TWO.

OH BOY, THE *SLEEP* PHASE!

FOR SOME OF US, YES.

BUT FOR FIGHTER AND BLACK MAGE, IT'S MORE LIKE THE CLEANING PHASE.

I DON'T RE-CALL VOTING FOR THAT

I DECIDED IT WAS RED MAGE'S CALL AND THEN I DECIDED THAT HE VOTED YOU TWO TO DO IT.

MAN, DEMOCRACY *SUCKS* WHEN ONLY ONE GUY IS IN CHARGE.

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HAVING DEFEATED THE NEFARIOUS DARK ELF PLOT TO DESTROY THE HALLOWED LANDS OF ELF, THE LIGHT WARRIORS SET OUT TO RETURN THE RECOVERED MAGIC CRYSTAL EYE OF MATOYA ALONG WITH A FORMULA FOR WHAT THIEF HOPED TO BE THE CURE TO HIS FATHER'S ILLNESS.

I SHALL RETURN WITH YOUR CURE, FATHER. I HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN MY PROMISE

BUT THE CITIZENS OF ELFLAND WERE STILL STANDING AROUND AWAITING THE CEREMONY OF CROWNING.

MAN, I DON'T HAVE *TIME* FOR THIS.

I'M A BUSY ELF I'VE GOT PLACES TO GO, PEOPLE TO ACT SUPERIOR TO, AND ELDER-THAN-THOU ATTITUDES TO EXPRESS.

OH I KNOW! PEOPLE SEEM TO THINK IT'S EASY TO PERPETUATE THESE TOLKIEN-ESQUE STEREOTYPES OF HAUGHTY ELVES. IN REALITY IT'S *VERY* HARD WORK.

EVEN IF IT DOES COME QUITE NATURALLY

WHICH IT CERTAINLY DOES!

AND LO, THE ELVES DID STAND OUT THERE FOR QUITE A WHILE BECAUSE THEY WERE COMMANDED BY ROYAL DECREE TO BE THERE UNTIL THE CLOSE OF THE CEREMONIES. MAYBE THEY BLINDLY FOLLOWED THEIR LEADER AND STARVED TO DEATH. MAYBE THEY GOT BORED AND WENT HOME. WHO CARES? THEY'RE STUPID ELVES!

WHAT OF THE LIGHT WARRIORS AND THEIR TRAVELS BACK TO THE HUMAN LANDS?

THEIRS WAS NO EASY VOYAGE THEY FACED CHALLENGES AT EVERY TURN.

ANCIENT EVILS WERE SLAIN, WRONGS WERE RIGHTED, AND BANDITS WERE SCATTERED TO THE WINDS

MANY WERE THEIR ADVENTURES IN THESE DAYS AND THE LIGHT WARRIORS GREW IN POWER AND REPUTATION.

SONGS OF THEIR EXPLOITS WERE SPREAD BY THE BARDS OF ALL THE LANDS OF THE WORLD

THE RESULTANT CHRONOPLASTIC BACKLASH RE-WROTE MOST RECENT HISTORY

AS FOR THE LIGHT WARRIORS..

UNFORTUNATELY A WIZARD IN A FAR OFF LAND HAD BEEN CONDUCTING CAUSALITY EXPERIMENTS SO HE COULD DEVELOP A SPELL TO EAT HIS DINNER WITHOUT HAVING TO FIRST PREPARE IT

WHY YES, AS A HIGH LEVEL WIZARD, I DO FEEL JUSTIFIED EXPENDING SO MUCH TIME ON SUCH A TRIVIAL TRICK.

THANKS FOR ASKING.

DOES SOMETHING SEEM... I DON'T KNOW, *DIFFERENT* TO YOU GUYS?

YEAH.

BUT IT ALSO FEELS *CORRECT* SOMEHOW LIKE A HORRIBLE MISTAKE WAS CORRECTED IN AN INSANT

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KRAK!

BEEP!

HA HA

REDART!

BLUEART!

DNA
HAITOR

WHAT?!

JEFF'S DISCOUNT
DEATHTRAPS

ACME'S
EXPLOSIVES

CRASH!

STOP

BAH, SEAT BELTS. THEY KI... BE- CAUSE THEY HATE

WELL, WHAT'DYA KNOW?

I'M A MERE FEATHER FALL SPELL AWAY FROM TOTAL SAFETY

THAT'S MORE LIKE IT

I ALMOST FEEL SORRY FOR THOSE JERKS.

BUT THEN I REMEMBER I HATE THEM FOR NO PARTICULAR REASON.

HMM, WHAT HAVE WE HERE?

HUH. A FLAMING ARROW

I HAVEN'T SEEN ONE OF THESE IN A WHILE

I THINK THE LAST TIME WAS... YEAH, IT WAS WHEN WE CAME TO ELF- LAND THE FIRST TIME.

WHAT A COINCIDENCE I SHOULD FIND ANOTHER.

CRUSH

NOT REALLY.

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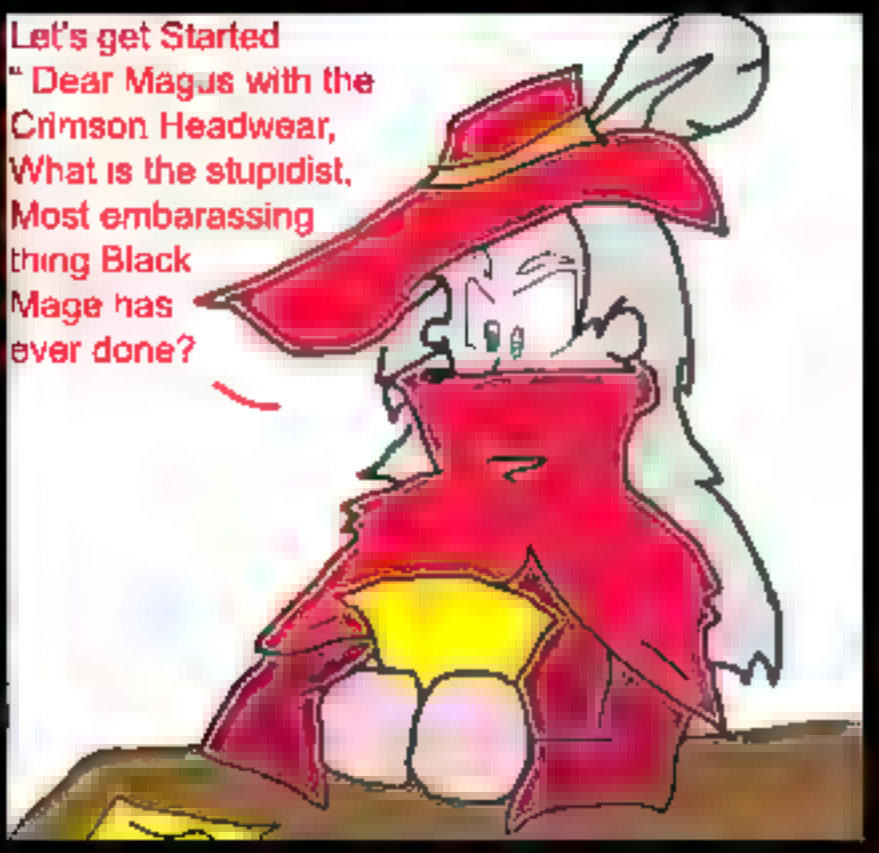
"SUBLIMATION" (288-A)

KIM McFARLAND '03

Welcome back to another "Twinkin' Out" With Red Mage! I m your host Red Mage


Let's get Started " Dear Magus with the Crimson Headwear, What is the stupidist, Most embarassing thing Black Mage has ever done?

Oh! This is an easy one! One time, when we were camping, BM tried to impress White Mage by going over to her and

Red Mage Shut's the he up

WE GATHER HERE TODAY TO MORN THE PASSING OF FIGHTER. VALIANT LIGHT WARRIOR, FRIEND, AND UM.. FIGHTER

HE WAS TAKEN FROM US BEFORE HIS TIME BY 65 STAB WOUNDS IN THE BACK.

HEHEH, WOULD HAVE BEEN MORE BUT THAT DANG KNIFE BROKE OFF SOMEWHERE IN HIS SPINE. NOT THAT I'M COUNTING OR ANYTHING

I'M NOT BEING PAID FOR THIS SO I'M DONE FOR THE DAY PAY YOUR RESPECTS IF YOU WANT, I'LL BE SITTING DOWN OVER THERE.

IF ONLY I ROLLED A DOUBLE YOU MIGHT BE HERE TODAY.

I'LL MAKE SURE TO BURN YOUR CHARACTER SHEET

WELL SEE YOU AROUND OL' PAL. AND BY "SEE YOU AROUND" I MEAN "TONIGHT", AND BY "PAL" I MEAN "GRAVE ROBBING VICTIM"

SNIFF I PROMISED MYSELF I WOULDN'T CRY..

WELL ASHES TO DUST AND ALL THAT. GET DOWN THE HOLE YOU HOLE FILLED CORPSE!

SO! WHO'S UP FOR A PARTY! I KNOW I - .

HEY BM WAKE UP!! YOU'VE GOT TO SEE THIS!!

THE HELL?

WAKE UP!!

ZZZZ *SNORT* WHAT? OH NO..

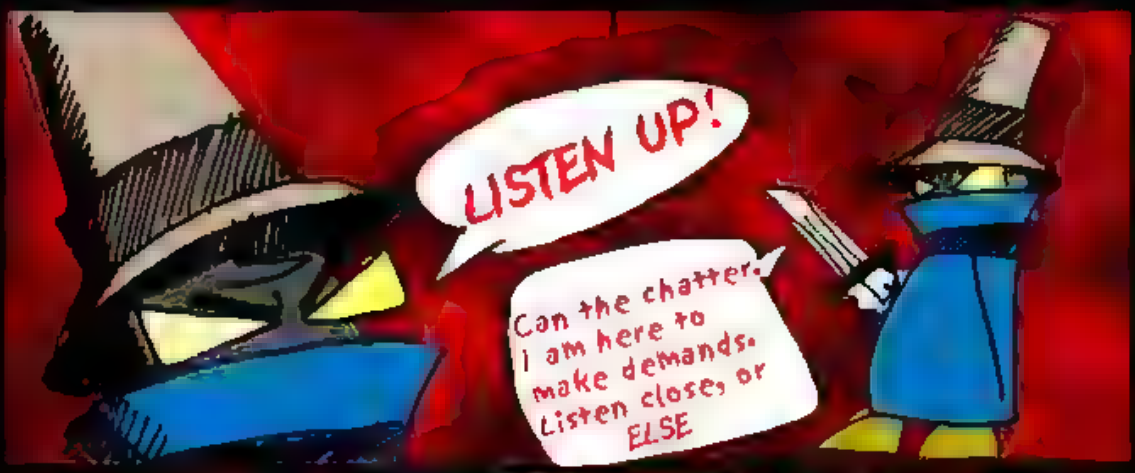
NO, IT CAN'T BE! I WAS *HAPPY!!* *NOOO!!!*

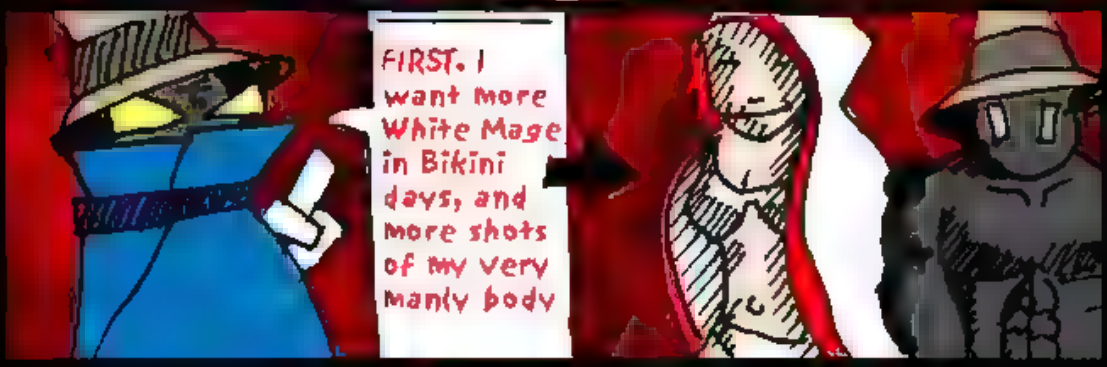
CHECK IT OUT, BM! IT'S A THREE LEAF CLOVER! CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? I'M THE LUCKIEST GUY EVER.

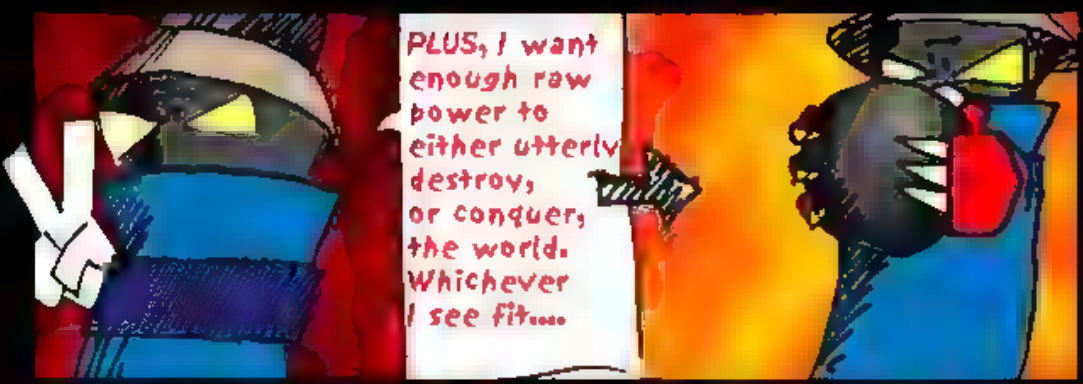
*WHY?! IT ISN'T FAIR!! IT'S NOT FAIR!! WHY!!! *SOB**

DON'T WORRY BM YOU'LL FIND ONE TOO SOME DAY

GUEST COMIC BY SCOTT RAMSOOMAIR







By Tristan Marsh. 8-Bit Theatre is property Brian "The Mad" [illegible]
As is all characters within, such as the Black Mage.
Go To wwwtype-fusion for more shit by us.....

RM, THERE'S A QUESTION I'VE BEEN MEANING TO ASK YOU.

ASK AWAY.

WHY ARE YOU A RED MAGE?

I CHOSE TO BE A RED MAGE BECAUSE IT BRINGS OUT THE COLOR IN MY EYES

BLACK + WHITE = NOT RED

THAT'S NOT IT

I MEAN, WHY IS YOUR BRAND OF MAGERY DUBBED 'RED' MAGIC?

IT'S THE COLOR OF MY WRETCHED SOUL.

BLACK MAGE'S NAME IS PRETTY SELF EXPLANITORY, AS IS WHITE MAGE'S

BUT THE COMBINATION OF THE TWO SCHOOLS, DOESN'T SEEM VERY APTLY NAMED

WOW FIGHTER HAS A VALID POINT

I'M SHOCKED

SHOCKED YOU SAY?

AS AM I

WELL, PREPARE TO GET GROUNDED!!

JUST DIE.

I DON'T GET IT.

0-1-4

UNWORTHY MAGRATEA

YOUR PROBLEM, DEAR FIGHTER, IS THAT YOU ASSUME THAT MAGIC OPERATES UNDER THE SAME PRINCIPALS AS VISIBLE LIGHT OR PIGMENT

THAT'S [illegible] NOT THE CASE

THE COLORS OF MAGIC ARE COLORS THAT CANNOT BE SEEN BY THE HUMAN EYE OR VISUALIZED WITHOUT INTENSE TRAINING AND STUDY

THE ALCHEMY OF WHITE AND BLACK MAGIC TO MAKE RED MAGIC IS A COMPLEX THING THAT A [illegible] HAS TO STUDY FOR YEARS AND YEARS TO [illegible] COMPREHEND AND MASTER. WHY I'VE [illegible] KNOW THAT [illegible] POINT I [illegible] THERE

BM, IS ANY OF THIS EVEN REMOTELY TRUE?

NOT ONE BIT.

I FORGOT WHAT WE WERE TALKING ABOUT

WE WERE DISCUSSING THE FINER POINTS OF STABBING RM IN THE FACE

OH YEAH

EKI EKI WOOD

8-Bit Theater © copyright Brian Clevinger

8-bit theater

BEHIND THE BITS

8-bit Theater had it all: money, fame, shineys, swords, horrible server problems, and cookies.

But there was trouble in Corneria.

Personal grudges and eccentric habits almost led them into the icky, sticky jaws of destruction.

I'm Savannah Vice, and I'll lead you through their tale of *misery* and *woe*.

Like all tales of misery and woe, this one begins in the *Giant's Forest*.

Giant's Forest
No Solicitors

Behind the Bits
by Jordan Rohrer
www.insanityink.com

NO. DEMR FRIEND DON'T TRY TO TALK ME OUT OF IT

OH, THIS ONE TAKES ME BACK.

I WAS GOING TO DO SOMETHING HERE, BUT FIGHTER LOOKED LIKE HE HAD THE SITUATION UNDER CONTROL.

AND THE GIANT HAD HIM UNDER A CLUB. HAH!

Later, a vote to determine the party turned friend against friend. Fighter remembers that incident.

How did you *feel* when Black Mage tried to kick you out?

CLEARLY ONE OF US WAS TO GO

TO BE HONEST, SAVANNAH, I FELT HUNGRY

AND A LITTLE DROWSY

Red Mage edged out White Mage and joined the party.

IT WAS A CLOSE CALL, BUT I USED **DUBYA'S HANGING CHAD** SPELL TO WIN THE RACE

Dubya's Hanging Chad
+1 in all elections

DO I **REGRET** NOT ADVENTURING WITH THEM?

YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT?

Later on Behind the Bits, Fighter discusses his drug problem

8-bit theater

I COULDN'T EVEN GET OUT OF BED WITHOUT A HIT OF AMNESIA DUST

THEN I'D FORGET WHY I WAS UP, AND GO BACK TO SLEEP

YOU KILLED HIM! YOU KILLED THE ONLY FRIEND I EVER HAD!

FEH.

WHAT ARE WE THEN? A COUPLE OF LIGHT WARRIOR SHAPED BAKED POTA-TOES?

OH WELL.

I'M SURE HAVING A SUPER LOYAL ARMY OF GIANTS WOULD HAVE HAD SOME MINUSES.

MIND YOU, I CAN'T THINK OF A SINGLE ONE AND IT'S ALL I CAN DO NOT TO CRY

THANKS FOR GETTING THAT GIANT OFF ME

STRETCH

WAIT A SECOND YOU'RE NOT DEAD!

THERE'S THAT ***KEEN*** ELVEN INTELLECT AT WORK.

BUT HOW?!

OH, IT'S QUITE SIMPLE.

SOME GOD MUST'VE BEEN WATCHING OVER ME. NEAR AS I CAN TELL, I WAS RIGHT UNDER THE ARCH OF HIS FOOT AND I ESCAPED DEATH.

IT WAS CRAMPED AND SMELLED LIKE A ZOMBIE'S USED GYM SOCKS, BUT AT LEAST I'M NOT DEAD

LET'S NOT FORGET WHAT KIND OF GOD WOULD TRY TO PROTECT BM.

IT'S A MIRACLE

AS THE GIANT FELL, I CRUMPLED INTO A FETAL POSITION, AS PER MY COWARDICE. Y'KNOW, LIKE AN ELF

GO ON.

GRAH!

AN ***EVIL*** MIRACLE IS STILL TECHNIC-ALLY A MIR-ACLE.

SO IT WOULD SEEM.

SO WHERE'S FUGLY MCSTUPID? BY WHICH I MEAN FIGHTER 'CAUSE I DON'T LIKE HIM.

HE'S AVENGING YOUR DEATH BY ATTACKING THE SLAIN GIANT LIKE A HOBO ON A BAKED POTATO.

WHAT IS WITH YOU AND POTATOES TODAY?

I'M HUNGRY

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THE LIGHT WARRIORS, HAVING VALIANTLY SLAIN THE GIANT .

THAT'LL MAKE YOU THINK TWICE BEFORE SUCCUMBING TO GRAVITY CHUMP

YOU CAN'T REALLY TAUNT THE DEAD

YEAH. THAT'S LIKE KICKIN' 'EM WHILE THEY'RE DOWN!

BWA HA HAHAHA!

..VISITED THE NOBLE KING OF ELFLAND TO COMPLETE THIEF'S QUEST BY RESTORING THE HEALTH OF HIS FATHER, THE KING, WITH THE ANTIDOTE TO THE SLEEPING POISON GIVEN TO HIM BY CHANCELLOR USURPER WHO WAS *REALLY* THE DARK ELF KING ASTOS IN DISGUISE TRYING TO DESTROY ELFLAND FROM THE INSIDE FOR PERSECUTING HIS PEOPLE MILLENIA AGO.

DAMN ELVES ALWAYS MAKE THINGS STUPIDLY COMPLICATED.

WOW. DO I FEEL BETTER!

AND, PLEASE, NO MEDICINAL HERB JOKES.

FATHER!

YOUR ROYAL, ER ELFNESS.

HEH, "KICKIN' 'EM WHILE THEY'RE DOWN"

MAN, I'M HILARIOUS

BUT ALL WAS NOT WELL WITHIN THE RANKS OF THE LIGHT WARRIORS

WE ALL KNEW THIS DARK DAY WOULD EVENTUALLY COME TO PASS.

WHAT, YOU MEAN THURSDAY? THEY'VE GOT ONE OF THOSE EVERY WEEK AS REGULAR AS CLOCKWORK, THIEF WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

I'M NOT GOING TO DIGNIFY THAT WITH A BACK STAB.

YET....

NO, FIGHTER. I, YOUR FEARLESS AND FAULTLESS LEADER, MUST LEAVE YOU.

GASP!

...OF JOY! HEH HEH, THREE ZINGS IN A ROW. I'M ON THE ROLL OF MY LIFE!

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WELL, IT WAS A GREAT TREAT HAVING MY LIFE RUINED BY YOU.

I DON'T THINK I'LL EVER FORGET THE ***INTENSELY*** VIOLENT REVENGE FANTASIES I'D COOK UP ***EVERY*** TIME YOU OPENED YOUR UGLY ELVEN NOISE-HOLE.

AND [illegible] BE GOING BUT AT LEAST WE'LL ALWAYS HAVE OUR MUTUAL LOATHING FOR THESE TWO AND EACH OTHER

NOTHING CAN TAKE THAT AWAY FROM US.

EH... THIEF?

DAMMIT, I WAS MAKING SOME ***GREAT*** POINTS.

OH LAMENTATIONS! WE SHALL BE AS A RUDDERLESS, CAPSIZING CARGO SHIP FILLED WITH ANVILS AND LEAD BARS WITHOUT YOUR DIVINE GUIDANCE.

YOU'LL CATCH YOUR DEATH OF COLD OUT THERE IN THE COLD, HARSH... ***COLD*** WORLD.

HERE'S SOME MONEY TO BUY FOOD WITH.

I'M GOING TO LIVE IN THE PALACE OF THE RICHEST, MOST ANCIENT CULTURE IN THE WORLD AS AN ELITE MEMBER OF THEIR RULING CLASS. COLD AND STARVATION DON'T REALLY ENTER INTO IT.

BUT FIVE BUCKS ***IS*** FIVE BUCKS. YOINK!

HE'S DONE NOTHING BUT STEAL EVERYTHING WE'VE EARNED--

AND A ***TON*** MORE

--AND YOU'RE GIVING HIM A HAND OUT?!

I DON'T WANT THE POOR GUY TO GO HUNGRY.

THE WORLD CAN BE A B.G, SCARY PLACE WHEN YOU'RE WITHOUT GOOD FRIENDS LIKE YOU, BM.

THERE'S SO MUCH WRONG WITH THAT SENTIMENT, I CAN'T EVEN GO INTO IT

BUT WHILE I'M REELING FROM THE INESCAPABLE DEPTHS OF YOUR STUPIDITY, I'M FORCED TO WONDER HOW YOU COULD HAVE COME ACROSS FIVE DOLLARS AT ALL SINCE THIEF HAS SUBSCRIBED US TO A LIFE OF CRIPPLING POVERTY IN HIS NAME

OH, IT WAS YOUR "AT LEAST THIEF AIN'T GONNA GET ***THESE*** FIVE DOLLARS" FUND YOU TOLD ME TO HIDE IN MY SCABBARD AND THEN FORGET ABOUT

SPUH...

CRISH!

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I CAN'T BELIEVE WE MADE IT

HEY, YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY ANY LANDING YOU CAN WALK AWAY FROM..

I DON'T THINK THAT SAYING COUNTS IF YOU HAVE TO CAST HIGH-LEVEL HEALING SPELLS TO REACH A STATE WHERE YOU ARE ***CAPABLE*** OF WALKING.

HEY, ANY LANDING THAT YOU'RE CONSCIOUS ENOUGH TO CAST SPELLS FROM..

THAT'S ENOUGH.

BUT I WAS JUST GONNA--

NO, REALLY THAT IS ENOUGH. IF I HEAR ANOTHER WORD OUT OF YOU, I MAY HAVE TO TEMPORARILY FORGET ABOUT THE WHITE MAGE'S OATH. UNDERSTAND?

MEANWHILE.

TELL ME, MY SON, HOW LONG WAS I ASLEEP?

A LITTLE OVER A YEAR.

MY GODS..

SO MUCH HAS PASSED ME OVER IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE.

AN ENTIRE ERA HAS IGNORED ME.

I AM BECOME A RELIC

TELL ME, MY SON. WHAT ARE THE ELVEN FASHIONS LIKE HERE IN THE TERRIFYING FUTURE?

ARE BROWNS AND GREENS STILL IN? DO I LOOK LIKE A DORK? BE HONEST, IT'S THE ONLY WAY I'LL LEARN.

DAD, WE'RE ***ELVES***. GREEN AND BROWN ARE PRETTY MUCH THE ALPHA AND OMEGA OF OUR FASHION SENSE.

WHEW, DODGED AN ARROW THERE, DIDN'T I

OH, THEY STILL USE ARROWS DON'T THEY?

WE HAVEN'T INVENTED SOME SORT OF HIGH-TECH POST-ARROW WEAPONRY HAVE WE?

SAY, SOMETHING THAT UTILIZES EXTREMELY RAPID EXO-THERMIC REACTIONS LIKE THOSE FOUND IN OUR CEREMONIAL "FIREPOWDER" FOR THE DELIVERY MECHANISM INSTEAD OF THE ANTIQUATED ELASTIC EFFECT OF BENDING WOODEN POLES.

FIRE-POWDER ***BOWS***? YOU'D BLOW YOUR HANDS OFF. IT'S MADNESS.

SO NO HOVER-HORSES AND CARTS YET EITHER, I SUPPOSE.

NOPE

WHAT THE HELL HAVE OUR SCIENTISTS BEEN DOING ALL THIS TIME?!

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THEN WE ARE IN AGREEMENT, RIGHT?

BUT WE HAVEN'T AGREED TO *ANYTHING* YET

SHUT UP, YES WE HAVE

I'M THE NEW LEADER. WITH THIEF GONE, WE NEED A STRONG, CHARISMATIC LEADER TO TAKE THE REIGNS AND GUIDE THIS RAGTAG GROUP OF YOU IDIOTS TO UNRIVALED GLORY

HEY, I'M STRONG, AND PEOPLE LIKE ME MAYBE *I* SHOULD BE THE NEW BOSS.

OH NO YA DON'T BEING BOSSED BY THIEF WAS BAD ENOUGH, I M NOT *ABOUT* TO TAKE ORDERS FROM YOU.

SOUNDS LIKE VOTIN' TIME TO ME!

I VOTE ME!

I VOTE FOR FIGHTER AS WELL.

CURSE YOUR HORRIBLE BONES, DEMOC-RACY!

ALL HAIL OUR NEW TEAM CAPTAIN, FIGHTER

WEE! I AM TOTALLY HAILED

WHAT SHALL YOUR FIRST PROCLAMATION AS LEADER BE, FIGHTER?

OH I THINK WE ALL KNOW WHAT THAT WILL ENTAIL, DON'T WE?

STATELY ELF CASTLE, WITH ELDRITCH GLOW ACTION.

EVERY DAY SHALL BE SWORD DAY

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KA-BOOM!

WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?!

MILITARY COUP.

ALL HAIL BLACK GUEVARA.

YOU KNOW, FIGHTER AND I HAVE SUPERIOR NUMBERS. WE COULD OVERTHROW YOUR DEMENTED REGIME EASILY

WE CAN DO THIS ONE OF TWO WAYS.

THE EASY WAY...

OR THE EXCRUCIATINGLY PAINFUL DEATH FOR RED MAGE WAY

I SUGGEST THE FORMER, M'SELF

YOU'RE WELCOME TO *TRY* THE LATTER OF COURSE, BUT I ASSURE YOU IT'S A WASTED EFFORT.

YOU ARE UP AGAINST A KNIFE-WIELDING SOCIOPATH JUST *LOOKING* FOR AN EXCUSE TO HURT YOU EVEN IF HE HAS TO MAKE ONE UP

SURELY THIS MANIAC WILL SLAUGHTER US ALL!

IF GIVEN HALF A CHANCE...

?

HE DOESN'T KNOW WE'RE *HERE* DOES HE?!

I THINK YOU MISUNDER-STOOD.

OH, I SEE! WE'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF STATELY ELF CASTLE THERE'S GUARDS AND HUNDREDS OF SQUARE MILES FILLED WITH HATEFUL XENOPHOBES BETWEEN US AND THIS PSYCHO.

NOT EXACTLY

OH, WHAT'RE YOU WORRIED ABOUT, RM? WE'RE PERFECTLY SAFE HERE!

AND AS LONG AS YOU FOLLOW *MY* EVERY WHIM WITHOUT QUESTION OR HESITATION, THAT STATEMENT WILL REMAIN MOSTLY TRUE.

I CAN'T BELIEVE *THIEF* WAS THE MORAL COMPASS THAT KEPT US FROM BECOMING A PACK OF ROVING MURDERERS.

YEAH, IT'S A CRAZY WORLD.

I MEAN, THINK ABOUT IT. *WE'RE* THE HEROES HERE.

GOOD LORD, WE'RE DOOMED

NO, NO, NO. EVERYONE *ELSE* IS DOOMED

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THE NEXT MORNING.

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL DAY I FEEL COMPLETELY REJUVENATED.

ESPECIALLY IN THAT I'VE GOT A NEW HADOKEN FOR THE DAY SO DON'T TRY ANYTHING ESPECIALLY STUPID WAY

WHAT UNSPEAKABLE CRIME WILL YOU HAVE US COMMIT FIRST?

WE WILL SCOPE OUT THE AIRSHIP/DEATHTRAP WRECKAGE, USE RM'S POTENTIALLY IMMENSE INTELLECT TO REPAIR IT, AND HEAD BACK CORNERIA. THIS WHOLE CONTINENT STINKS WITH ELF

HUH. THAT DOESN'T SOUND TOO ATROCIOUS. UNLESS..

ARE WE DOING THIS SO WE CAN DROP ROCKS ON BABIES?

NO! AND I'LL THANK YOU TO CEASE THIS APPALLING LINE OF CONVERSATION BEFORE IT DAMAGES MY DELICATE SENSITIVIES ANY FURTHER!

OKAY. ARE WE GOING TO DROP BABIES ON ROCKS?

ER UH, WELL...

IT'S A CRIME WITHOUT VICTIMS!

WHAT ABOUT THE BABIES?!

THEY'RE ELVES! NO JURY IN THE WORLD WOULD CONVICT US.

WHAT ABOUT THE ELVEN COURTS? THEY WANTED TO HANG US FOR BREATHING!

IT'S MY PLAN TO ESCAPE CAPTURE FOR A FULL GENERATION WHILE WE BABY-ICIDE THEIR WHOLE SPECIES UNTIL THERE'S NO ELVES LEFT TO CHARGE US.

YOU REALIZE OF COURSE THAT ELVES LIVE FOR HUNDREDS AND HUNDREDS OF YEARS.

I'M A THIRTY-SEVEN YEAR OLD VIRGIN. CREEPY, AIN'T IT

OH FINE. WE OUGHT REPAIR THE DEATHTRAP ANYWAY I GUESS.

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WELL, IT'S NOT WRECKED *THAT* BADLY WHEN DO YOU THINK YOU'LL HAVE 'ER UP AND RUNNING AGAIN?

BUT IT'S *STILL* ON FIRE.

YEAH, THE MAGICAL RESIDUE FROM THE SPELLS THAT KEPT THIS THING RELATIVELY ALOFT ARE GONNA BURN FOR WEEKS.

SO, WHAT'RE WE LOOKIN' AT? THREE, FIVE HOURS TOPS?

LET'S SEE. *HALF* THE VESSEL IS LODGED DEEP WITHIN THE EARTH.

THE OTHER HALF IS ON *FIRE*

YEAH, ABOUT A DAY SOUNDS RIGHT PLUS OR MINUS *ETERNITY* *'CAUSE IT AIN'T HAPPENIN'!*

SOME RED MAGE *YOU* TURNED OUT TO BE YOU MUST BE A TERRIBLE DISAPPOINTMENT TO YOUR WHOLE FAMILY

SO... A WHOLE DAY?

EVEN IF I COULD FAKE THE TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE, I AM LACKING IN TOOLS OF ANY KIND

YES, BUT FOR UNRELATED REASONS.

SON, I HATE YOU BECAUSE I WANTED A DAUGHTER.

HAROLD! YOU'LL GIVE HIM A COMPLEX!

OH WE *BOTH* KNOW IT'S TOO LATE FOR THAT

MEANWHILE, SOME DISTANCE AWAY

WHY DIDN'T YOU LOVE ME, DADDY?

I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M SAYING THIS, BUT I'M GOING TO GO TALK WITH FIGHTER NOW.

WOW. WHITE MAGE. HOW DID YOU EVER KNOW THAT THE BILLOWING TOWER OF SMOKE WOULD LEAD US STRAIGHT TO THE LIGHT WARRIORS?

ARE YOU SERIOUS?!

OH YEAH. THE BILLOWING TOWER OF SMOKE PART

YEAH, THAT'S THEM ALL OVER REALLY

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CAN I COME DOWN NOW BM?

I DON'T KNOW.. I'M NO DOCTOR-- DAMN YOU, HIPPOCRATES-- BUT I'D SAY IF YOU'RE STILL TALKING, THEN YOU'RE STILL ALIVE.

THERE-FORE..

I'M NOT DONE YET

EXACTLY!

BY THE LIGHT OF THE ORDER...!

WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU DOING?! FIGHTER, GET DOWN FROM THERE NOW!

BUT I WAS ONLY DOING WHAT BLACK MAGE TOLD ME TO

OH, I'M *SURE* YOU WERE.

DON'T GIVE ME THAT LOOK. I WAS STARVING HIS BRAIN OF OXYGEN. HE WOULDN'T HAVE EVEN *FELT* DEATH. I WAS DOING HIM A FAVOR, LADY

THIS IS YOUR IDEA OF A FAVOR?!

fa vor 'fA-v&r
Function noun
1 gracious kindness, also an act of such kindness
< Black Mage granted Fighter a painless death as a favor >

PRETTY MUCH.

LOOK. YOU... I... Y'KNOW? I DON'T HAVE TO TALK TO YOU. WHERE'S THIEF?

WE LEFT HIS SCRAWNY ELF ASS BACK AT THE STUPID ELF CASTLE. GOOD RIDDANCE TO BAD LEADERS.

WHAT? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? *LEFT* HIM? YOU CAN'T DO THAT!

OH YES WE CAN. AND WE DID IT WAS REMARKABLY EASY AND QUITE PLEAS-ANT

BUT YOU DON'T UNDER-STAND THERE ARE FOUR LIGHT WARR-IORS.

NO, THERE ARE *THREE* LIGHT WARRIORS. AND I'D HAVE IT DOWN TO TWO BY NOW BUT *YOU* SCREWED THAT UP

THUD!

I GOT DOWN.

YOU SURE DID

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YOU CAN'T JUST KILL OFF YOUR FELLOW LIGHT WARRIORS, BLACK MAGE!

SURE SEEMS THAT WAY

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW HARD I'VE BEEN TRYING?

NO. LISTEN TO ME.

LISTEN'N'

THE LEGENDS ARE VERY SPECIFIC ABOUT THIS. THERE ARE FOUR WARRIORS, CHOSEN BY FATE, TO RID THE WORLD OF EVIL AND BRING ABOUT A NEW GOLDEN AGE.

THE ORDER OF THE WHITE MAGES ARE THE KEEPERS OF THIS LEGEND.

IT IS OUR SACRED CHARGE TO MAKE SURE FATE'S WILL IS EXERCISED IN CASE SOMETHING GOES WRONG.

I WILL NOT FAIL MY ORDER I WILL NOT LET GENERATIONS AND GENERATIONS OF WORK AND DEVOTION GO TO WASTE

I WILL NOT SIT IDLY BY WHILE THE THREADS OF FATE BECOME FRAYED.

YOU WILL RETURN TO ELF CASTLE, YOU WILL FIND THIEF, AND CONTINUE YOUR QUEST

WHAT?

HM? OH, YOU'RE DONE

YES. WELL. YOUR POINT OR POINTS MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE BEEN EXCELLENT, BUT I MUST DISAGREE ON THE BASIS THAT I'M SURE IT INVOLVES ME DOING THINGS I'D RATHER NOT

YOU DIDN'T HEAR A WORD I SAID, DID YOU.

IT'S NOT YOU, BABY IT'S YOUR ***KNOCKERS***. I KNOW THOSE ROBES ARE ***SUPPOSED*** TO EMPHASIZE YOUR CHASTE MODESTY, BUT ***DYAMN***, GIRL.

UH-OH.

MEANWHILE, ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DEATHTRAP

OH YEAH, THIS L'IL PUPPY IS SHOT

YOUR WHOLE REAR ROTARY VALVE FIXTURE IS GOING TO NEED REPLACING.

DON'T TELL ME THAT I GOTTA TAKE OUT THE ENTIRE UPPER GEAR ASSEMBLY JUST TO GET **NEAR** THAT THING.

YOU BETTER HOPE THE RETAINING FLANGES AREN'T CRACKED

I DON'T SEE HOW THEY **COULDN'T** BE AFTER A FALL LIKE THAT, I MEAN WE'RE LUCKY TO BE ALIVE.

IT'S THOSE NEW-FANGLED CRUMPLE ZONES. THEY'RE HELL ON THE VEHICLE, BUT THEY ABSORB THE IMPACT

WHAT ABOUT THE IMPACT OF ME HITTING THE FLOOR WHEN I SEE ALL THE WORK THAT'S GOT TO BE DONE.

WOW, YOU GUYS ARE KNOWLEDGEABLE!

WELL, YOU DON'T GET TO BE A RED MAGE WITHOUT KNOWING JUST **ENOUGH** ABOUT EVERYTHING TO BE CONSIDERED INCREDIBLY DANGEROUS BY MOST FEDERAL STANDARDS.

AND MARTIAL ARTS IS MORE THAN JUST HITTING PEOPLE TO DEATH.

THERE'S ALSO ZEN AND THE ART OF AIRSHIP MAINTENANCE.

'CAUSE I STUDIED AIRSHIP REPAIR BACK IN MY "HIGHER LEARNING" DAYS AND I **NEVER** HEARD OF THE STUFF YOU GUYS ARE TALKING ABOUT

OKAY, OKAY! MARTIAL ARTS *IS* NOTHING MORE THAN THE ULTIMATE SCIENCE OF HURTING PEOPLE A LOT

I JUST WANTED TO LOOK SMART FOR ONCE

HEH. I UH, I'M KINDA EMBARRASSED TO ADMIT THIS, BUT I UM, I WAS MAKIN' THAT STUFF UP IN A SAD ATTEMPT AT MALE BONDING.

SEE, MY DAD NEVER--

VERRRSH!

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WELL, THIS IS CLEARLY *WELL* BEYOND OUR ABILITIES. THE DAMAGE IS SIMPLY TOO EXTENSIVE.

YEAH, PLUS THE DEATHTRAP IS ALL SMASHED UP

IT'S IN BETTER SHAPE THAN... *THIS.*

AREN'T YOU OBLIGATED TO HELP HIM?

OR WHAT'S LEFT OF HIM?

AFTER ALL, YOU WHITE MAGES HAVE AN OATH TO HEAL THE INJURED, ETC.

GURGLE PLEASE.. HELP ME IN DA *SACK!* GURGLE

TECHNICALLY

MEANWHILE, AT STATELY ELF CASTLE ..

I MUST SPEAK WITH YOU.

HOLD ON, DAD

DURING MY TRAVELS I HAD A REVELATION OF TAX CODE PROPORTIONS I STAYED UP MOST OF THE NIGHT COMPLETELY RE-WRITING OUR TAX LAWS.

I'M SURE THAT'S VERY INTERESTING, BUT THIS IS-- *WHAT?!*

AND, IN ITS PLACE, INSTITUTING THE "IRS"

WHAT'S AN "EYARESS"?

I STARTED BY DISSOLVING OUR COLLECTION AGENCY

I-R-S. DAD IT STANDS FOR *INTERNATIONAL REVENUE SERVICE.* BASICALLY..

THE GIST OF IT IS THAT EVERYONE IN THE WORLD OWES *US* TAXES.

AND ANYONE WHO DOESN'T COME THROUGH WITH THE MONEY IS SUBJECT TO AN AUDIT

407th platoon

I LOVE YOU.

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I'M AFRAID WE HAVE MORE URGENT MATTERS TO DISCUSS THAN TAX REGULATIONS.

WE'RE THE ARISTOCRACY WHAT *COULD* ***POSSIBLY*** BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN TAXING MILLIONS OF PEOPLE WHO DIDN'T HAVE THE SENSE TO BE BORN RICH AND POWERFUL?!

A KING AND HIS LAND IT'S A VERY OLD RULE, SON. WHEN THE KING IS HEALTHY, THE KINGDOM IS BOUNTIFUL WHEN THE KING IS ILL, THE KINGDOM IS RUINED I WAS ABSENT ILL FOR A LONG TIME.

WHAT ARE YOU.

THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE.

OUR KINGDOM, NO, OUR LANDS. THEY ARE ROTTING.

THIS IS ELFLAND "AS THE EARTH IS ETERNAL, SO TOO ARE THE ELVES." AS YOU SAY, IT IS A VERY OLD RULE.

SO TRUE.

WE ARE TIED TO OUR LANDS.

IT IS THE PRICE PAID BY OUR AGELESS RACE BUT THAT BOND GOES BOTH WAYS. WHEN ASTOS HAD ME POISONED, IT MADE ALL OF ELFLAND VULNERABLE

BUT YOU'RE BETTER NOW!

YET THE DAMAGE HAS BEEN DONE

WE MAY HAVE UNDERESTIMATED ASTOS'S AMBITIONS OR PERHAPS HE WAS A PAWN OF FATE'S ALL ALONG AS WELL.

IN ANY CASE, HIS ATTACK AGAINST ME IS AN ATTACK AGAINST ELFLAND ITSELF IF WE DO NOT SEEK TO REPAIR WHAT HAS BEEN DONE, IT WILL BE THE DOOM OF US ALL.

WE HAVE THE WISEST AND MOST POWERFUL SAGES IN ALL THE WORLD. SURELY WE CAN STOP THIS!

I BELIEVE WE CAN.

BUT WE'LL NEED THE EARTH ORB.

AND IT CAN BE NO COINCIDENCE THAT YOU HAPPENED UPON THOSE ***BUNGLERS*** IN YOUR QUEST TO SAVE ME

THE LIGHT WARRIORS? DON'T TELL ME ***YOU'VE*** FALLEN FOR ALL THAT TALK ABOUT DESTINY TOO.

LIGHT WARRIORS ARE SUPPOSED TO REKINDLE THE POWER OF THE ORBS.

OUR EARTH ORB IS UNDOUBTEDLY DAMAGED

IT IS A PRINCE'S DUTY TO PROTECT HIS KINGDOM. AFTER A WHILE, COINCIDENCES STOP BEING COINCIDENCES, [OK].

NO THEY DON'T. THAT'S WHAT A COINCIDENCE ***IS***.

I SAW IT AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO MILK SOME CASH OUT OF THE CORNERIAN COFFERS TO HELP PAY FOR YOUR "MEDICINE"

LOOK. THE RUBES OVER IN CORNERIA WERE HIRING "LIGHT WARRIORS" AS MUSCLE FOR SOME LOCAL POLITICAL POSTURING BETWEEN THE RULING CLASS AND A DISENCHANTED EX-MILITARY LEADER, OKAY?

THE WHOLE LIGHT WARRIOR THING IS JUST A ***SHTICK*** THEY'RE FOOLS BEING LEAD BY A GREEDY CHARLATAN.

WA-CHOO!

I CAN THINK OF NO BETTER GROUP TO BE TRUSTED WITH THE POWER OF THE ORBS.

THERE IS A STRANGE SENSE IN WHAT YOU SAY

WHAT MUST I DO, FATHER?

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Fighter's Journal

(do not look, especially if you are Black Mage!)

Being a Light Warrior(!!!) continues to be fun. I get to meet so many intrest ing people and put into life or death situations. Just like a REAL hero!!!!

So much has happened. Thief left the group and we are all still very sad. Everyone has their own way of morning. Black Mage says he's never been happier since we started this whole "Light Warrior bull*BLEEP*" but I think he is only saying so to help me keep my spirits up. He is so good, always laug hing when bad things happen while other people mope. Or scream and bleed.

Black Mage is the new Light Warrior(!!!) leader now. It makes him happy and I can tell because he keeps giggling about the new "direction" we'll take. I thi nk he means NORTH 'cause that's where Corneria is and he probably misses home as much as me.

We met up with White Mage and Black Belt again. This time it was at the flaming wreckage of our airship. I got to fly in it like a bird!!! A bird inside a giant thaumechanical construct forged by aeromancers, but a bird all the same. We also fell like a bird, a huge dead explosive bird, but still a bird, and that is what made the reckage. I really like Black Belt. He is not as good a friend as Black Mage WHO BETTER NOT BE READING THIS BECAUSE THEY ARE MY PRIVATE JURNAL THOUGHTS. Black belt is the only other person who really "gets me" I think because we are both such ~~ninja~~ ~~ninja~~ kickin' warriors. He promised to show me some of his nunchuck moves later and I will adapt them into my sword-chuckery style!!! (NOTE TO FIGHTER: think of better style name than Sword-Chuckery Style)

Okay, I better go now. Everyone is talking about the airship but they need my technical knownow to diagnose what's wrong with it. Now is my chance to shine!!! Those three semesters of failing grades in trade school can't stop me now!

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SO WE'RE STUCK HERE?

UNDER ORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES, I'D SAY YES. BUT I'M HERE

BUT THEN *YOU* WOULDN'T SAY YES. BECAUSE *YOU'D* HAVE TO BE HERE TO SAY IT, WHICH WOULD THEN NEGATE YOU BEING HERE TO SAY IT BECAUSE YOU *NOT* BEING HERE IS WHAT MAKES IT ORDINARY ACCORDING TO WHAT YOU JUST SAID EVEN THOUGH YOU BEING HERE *IS* ORDINARY ANYWAY

LET'S PLAY THE QUIET GAME.

'KAY!

YOU GO FIRST

UNLESS MAYBE YOU WERE OBSERVING AN ORDINARY SITUATION FROM AFAR, IN WHICH CASE YOU COULD EASILY COMMENT UPON IT

BLACK MAGE CAN ANGLE HIS HADOKEN BLAST AT OUR FEET SUCH THAT THE EXPLOSION WILL PROPEL THE REST OF US INTO CORNERIAN AIR SPACE.

WE COULD PERFORM A HADO-JUMP

THANK YOU.

DO GO ON, RM.

WHAT ABOUT Y'KNOW, LANDING?

PLANNING *TOO* FAR AHEAD IS CALCIFYING. WE'LL PLAY IT BY EAR.

THE PART WITH THE EXPLODING? YEAH, THAT SEEMS UNNECESSARILY *SUICIDAL*.

I SHOULD HOPE SO! YOU GET DOUBLE XP FOR EXECUTING PLANS OF DERRING-DO.

I AM *SO* WINNING THIS QUIET GAME.

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SOME ART BY LYDIA

THE FOUR ARE UNITED ONCE MORE

THEN OUR WORK HERE IS FINISHED

BUT WE DIDN'T *DO* ANYTHING.

OH, DIDN'T WE, WHITE MAGE? DIDN'T WE?

NO.

I STAND BY MY STATEMENT

MEANWHILE...

SO EXPLAIN TO ME HOW WALKING CROSS COUNTRY DIRECTLY *AWAY* FROM THE AIRSHIP IS SUPPOSED TO REPAIR IT, OH ***BRAINLESS*** LEADER.

HEH HEH, BRAINLESS

IT'S QUITE SIMPLE. WE'RE GOING TO THE LAND OF THE DWARVES.

THEY'VE GOT THEIR GRUBBY LITTLE MAL-FORMED HANDS ON THE ORB OF EARTH WHICH WE NEED.

WHAT'S THIS *WE* BUSINESS?

LAST TIME I CHECKED, WATCHING ELF LAND AND EVERYONE IN IT ROT AWAY HAD NOTHING BUT POSITIVE EFFECTS ON ***MY*** LIFE

IN ADDITION TO BEING PETTY LITTLE CROOKS WHO ERRONEOUSLY CLAIM OWNERSHIP OF THE EARTH ORB, THE DWARVES ARE KNOWN FOR THEIR TECHNOLOGICAL INGENUITY

IF ANYONE CAN GET YOUR UNDESERVING HEATHEN SELVES OUT OF MY HOMELAND, IT'S THEM.

AND, AS A SIDE NOTE, ELF LAND WOULD ONLY BE THE ***FIRST*** TO BE AFFECTED BY THE EARTH ROT

ALL LANDS WOULD SOON BEFALL THE SAME FATE.

LONG AS ELF LAND GOES FIRST I WIN.

IF I MAY INTERJECT

WHY NOT? THE INANE BABBLE LEVELS HAVE BEEN PRETTY LOW LATELY

MUWA HA!

THIEF, YOUR PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BELLIGERENCE DIRECTED TOWARD THE DWARVEN RACE LEADS ME TO BELIEVE THAT THERE IS SOME TRUTH TO THE RUMORS OF THE GENERATIONS LONG ELF-DWARF CONFLICT

AM I CORRECT TO ASSUME THIS RIVALRY CENTERS ON CONTRADICTORY CLAIMS OF OWNERSHIP REGARDING THE EARTH ORB?

THAT'S ONE WAY TO PUT IT.

HOW WOULD *YOU* PUT IT?

THOSE STUMPY, BACKWARDS, HOLE-IN-THE-GROUND LIVIN' EVOLUTIONARY THROW BACKS WILL ***RUE*** THE DAY THEY [illegible] WITH THE KINGDOM OF ELF

OH.

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IF ELVES AND DWARVES GET ALONG SO FAMOUSLY, THEN ISN'T IT DANGEROUS FOR YOU TO LEAD US INTO THE DWARF KINGDOM?

MID, MORE TO THE POINT ISN'T IT DANGEROUS FOR *US* TO APPEAR SYMPATHETIC TO AN ELF?

TECHNICALLY, YES. BUT ALL ELVES KNOW THAT ALL *DWARVES* ARE STUPID

THAT, COMBINED WITH MY INNATE ABILITY AS A THIEF TO BE A MASTER OF DISGUISE, GUARANTEES THAT WE'LL BE SAFE AND UNDETECTED FOREVER

HM, A DISGUISE, *EH*?

WHY, A PLAN SO SIMPLE COULDN'T POSSIBLY FAIL US!

THIEF MAY BE ABLE TO HIDE HIS GOOFY LOOKIN EARS AND H.S STUPID POINTY SHOES BUT HE STILL SMELLS LIKE AN ELF

SURELY SUCH AN OUTDOORSY ODOR WOULD IMMEDIATELY OFFEND THE STINK-PALETTE OF ANY DWARF!

MAYBE IT'S JUST THE FACT THAT WE'RE GOING WITH A PLAN THAT RELIES ENTIRELY ON THE STUPIDITY OF *OTHER* PEOPLE INSTEAD OF OUR OWN SUPPOSED GENIUS, BUT I AGREE WITH *RM* ON THIS ONE

I'D BETTER TELL THEM--BUT DO I DARE GIVE UP THE QUIET GAME WHEN THE VAGUELY DEFINED TERMS FOR WINNING ARE NO DOUBT SO CLOSE AT HAND?

ANY OBJECTIONS?

I PREFER TO OBJECTIFY HEH.

THEN IT'S SETTLED WE'RE GOING WITH PLAN: GUARANTEED VICTORY!

WOW, WITH A NAME LIKE THAT, WE CAN'T LOSE. EVER!

ONWARD, GOOD FELLOWS!

OH WHAT TANGLED WEBS WE WEAVE WHEN FIRST WE PLAY THE QUIET GAME!

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SEVERAL DAYS OF TREKKING LATER.

I'M TELLING YOU, GIVEN SUFFICIENT TIME TO OBSERVE AND ANALYZE HIS OPPONENT, BATMAN WINS *ANY* ONE ON ONE CONFRONTATION, HANDS DOWN!

THREE DAYS OF THIS. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LONG LIFE, I AM OF THE OPINION THAT THE DWARF KINGDOM IS TOO FAR AWAY...

OKAY, I'VE GOT ONE DR. DOOM VS. BATMAN.

INTERESTING CHOICE. DOOM IS ARGUABLY BIT AS FANATICAL, ANALYTICAL, AND BRILLIANT AS THE BAT.

DOOM HAS A KINGDOM, WHILE BATMAN HAS WAYNE ENTERPRISES.

THEY BOTH HAVE ACCESS TO INCREDIBLE SUPER-GADGETS.

BOTH HAVE THE WILL-POWER OF A GOD AND THE PATIENCE OF A MOUNTAIN.

BOTH LAY INTRICATE PLANS AS SUBTLE AS THEY ARE PROFOUND

PLAN DOOM:
1. STOP RICHARDS.
2. RULE EVERYTHING.

BAT PLAN
1. STOP CRIME.
2. RULE EVERYTHING.

SO, FIGHTER, WE HARDLY GET A CHANCE TO TALK.

WHY DON'T WE GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER SO I DON'T HAVE TO HEAR THE NERDS TALKING WHILE THEY OBSESSIVELY DEBATE INCREDIBLY LAME THINGS?

JUST PRATTLE ABOUT SWORDS OR SOME SUCH. I DON'T CARE.

CLEVER, THIEF, BUT NOT CLEVER ENOUGH TO THWART FIGHTER! YOU'VE GOT TO WAKE UP MIGHTY EARLY IN THE MORNING TO BEAT ME. LET'S AT LEAST BY NOON THE QUIET GAME SHALL BE MINE!

TO BE FAIR, EACH COMBATANT SHOULD BE GIVEN HIS MOST FAVORABLE CIRCUMSTANCES.

BUT THAT IS MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE. BATMAN HAS AN EXTENSIVE SUPPORT NETWORK IN GOTHAM, WHILE DOOM HAS NIGH-LIMITLESS RESOURCES INSIDE LATVERIA.

WHAT IF THEY BATTLE ON THE GROUNDS OF THE LATVERIAN EMBASSY WHICH JUST HAPPENS TO BE IN GOTHAM CITY?

THAT STILL UNFAIRLY FAVORS BATMAN. WE NEED NEUTRAL GROUND

SOME SORT OF DECAYED URBAN ENVIRONMENT WHICH IS EQUIDISTANT FROM BOTH GOTHAM AND LATVERIA THEN

HM, NO RESPONSE FIGHTER, IF YOU HATE SWORDS, THEN SAY NOTHING.

I'LL GRANT THAT *IF* WE REMOVE RICHARDS FROM EXISTENCE FOR THIS EXERCISE. HE'S A WILDCARD, THAT ONE.

MUST RESIST TEMPTATION

OH, I *LIKE* WHERE THIS CONVERSATION IS GOING..

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...EXCELLENT

BUT BATMAN PLANS FOR *EVERY* CONTINGENCY, INCLUDING IMPOSSIBLE ONES. HE'D BE READY FOR *ANYTHING* DOOM THROWS AT HIM.

BE THAT AS IT MAY, DOOM IS A VILLAIN.

VILLAINS ARE MUCH MORE PRO-ACTIVE THAN HEROES. HEROES, BY THEIR NATURE, ARE PURELY REACTIONARY FORCES.

THE VILLAIN IS, IN ALL WAYS, AN AGENT OF CHANGE. A CATALYST

YOUR POINT?

WHEREAS BATMAN WOULD ENGAGE IN THIS BATTLE WITH RELATIVELY LITTLE FORETHOUGHT, WE CANNOT SAY THE SAME FOR DOOM.

IF DOOM WAS TO FACE BATMAN IN BATTLE, IT WOULD ONLY BE AT A TIME AND A PLACE OF DOOM'S CHOICE

AGREED..

THUS, ALTHOUGH BOTH CHARACTERS MAY BE AWAY FROM THEIR RESPECTIVE SUPPORT NETWORKS...

..DOOM WOULD HAVE THE UPPER HAND BECAUSE BATMAN WOULD NOT BE THERE AT *ALL* UNLESS DOOM WANTED HIM THERE.

AND DOOM WOULD NOT WANT HIM THERE UNLESS HIS VICTORY WAS GUARANTEED A PRIORI.

BUT THEREIN LIES THE FATAL FLAW IN DOOM'S PLAN.

BATMAN NEVER GIVES UP HE CANNOT BE [illegible]!

I'LL GIVE YOU THAT BECAUSE I'M FEELING GENEROUS *AND* BECAUSE I KNOW MY NEXT POINT WILL DEFEAT YOU.

DOOM WOULD SURELY APPROVE OF SUCH A TACTIC

I FEAR NOT YOUR REBUTTAL. *DO* GO ON.

LET US ASSUME THAT BATMAN *WINS*

DOOM'S MACHINATIONS ARE SUCH THAT EVEN *IF* BATMAN MANAGES TO BE TRIUMPHANT, HIS VICTORY WILL ONLY COME ABOUT IN A WAY THAT WILL SOMEHOW FURTHER DOOM'S OVERALL VILLAINOUS SCHEMES.

AD-VANTAGE, DOOM.

YES, SNIVELLING WIZARD OF THE CRIMSON POWER. AND SO IT SHALL *ALWAYS* BE FOR

DOOM!

WE OUGHT TO HAVE THESE LITTLE TALKS MORE OFTEN. THEY WILL SURELY.. *PROFIT* OUR FRIENDSHIP

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Y'KNOW, WE'RE GETTING AWFULLY CLOSE TO DWARVEN TERRITORY

YEAH, HEADING INTO THE DWARF KINGDOM WILL DO THAT

I *MEAN* YOU'RE LOOKIN' AWFULLY ELFISH.

OH, *THAT* WELL, I SUPPOSE NOW IS AS GOOD A TIME AS ANY, BUT I'LL NEED SOME HELP

YEAH? WELL I'LL SEE IF I CAN SCARE UP SOMEONE WHO GIVES HALF A SH!-*HEY!*

HEY!

SON OF A!

OUCH!

THAT DOESN'T GO THERE!

WATCH IT!

WELL, THAT DOES.

DONE.

HM, THAT'S A PRETTY GOOD DISGUISE

DAMN HANDSOME TOO.

I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT THINK SO.

WELL, ARE WE GOIN' OR WHAT?

WON'T OUR GROUP LOOK A LITTLE OUT OF THE ORDINARY WITH *TWO* DARK WIZARDS?

OH, THAT WON'T BE A PROBLEM. TRUST ME.

WHAT? I THOUGHT WE WERE DISGUISING OURSELVES.

WHY? JUST.. JUST *WHY?*

IS THAT THE SAME DRESS FROM...?

MAYBE IT IS. WHAT'S IT TO YOU, *DAD?*

UM.

THIS IS WHY THE DYSFUNCTIONAL HERO TREND NEEDS TO GET OVER ITSELF

YOU CAN'T IGNORE ME FOREVER! I HAVE FEELINGS!

I COULD *NOT* AGREE MORE

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MEANWHILE, BACK IN CORNERIA.

DAD, YOUR APPROVAL RATING IS SLIGHTLY LOWER THAN A HOLE IN THE HEAD.

OH, I'M SURE THEY'RE EXAGGERATING LIKE THE INFINITELY STUPID MORONS THEY ARE

WELL, THE POLL ONLY HAD TWO CHOICES. **ONE**, BE RULED OVER BY KING STEVE FOREVER **TWO**, GET A SWORD THROUGH YOUR HEAD

WE LOST 52% OF THE PARTICIPANTS.

TOUGH BUT FAIR.

LOOK, DAD

YOU GOT A LOT OF SYMPATHY OUT OF THAT "MY PRECIOUS DAUGHTER'S BEEN KIDNAPPED AGAIN" SHTICK.

BUT THAT WAS MONTHS AGO AND YOUR SUBSEQUENT RAPE OF THE EARTH CAMPAIGN DID NOT GO OVER WELL WITH... ER, **ANYONE**

OH SILLY, SILLY, **IGNORANT** SARA.

WE'RE ROYALTY WE NEED NOT APPROVAL RATINGS. A DISGRUNTLED, DISENCHANTED, AND DISENFRANCHISED POPULACE IS, IF ANYTHING, A SIGN OF OUR **SUCCESS** AS RULERS!

IT IS MUCH MORE DIFFICULT TO OVERTHROW A KING WHO IS LOVED THAN ONE WHO IS LOATHED

YOU MAY HAVE A POINT DESPITE YOUR BEING FEMALE

CRAZY HOW THAT WORKS OUT, AIN'T IT

WHAT WE NEED IS SOME CRAZY SCHEME TO ARTIFICIALLY INFLATE MY STANDING IN THE PUBLIC EYE SO I CAN GET AWAY WITH EVEN **MORE** ATROCITIES.

OR WE COULD START USING OUR POSITION RESPONSIBLY. CONSOLIDATE OUR FINANCIAL, CULTURAL, AND MILITARY POWER UNTIL WE ARE POISED TO TAKE OVER THE WORLD WITH PEACE AND STABILITY INSTEAD OF FEAR.

HELP USHER IN A NEW ERA OF PEACE, ETC.

SOMETHING LIKE AN UNSOLICITED ATTACK ON CORNERIA ITSELF!

YOU'RE NOT LISTENING TO ME ARE YOU.

I'M LISTENING TO WHAT NOW?

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ALL RIGHT, THERE'S SOME DWARVEN BORDER GUARDS UP AHEAD. EVERYONE, ACT NATURAL.

HALT!

WE'RE DWARVEN BORDER GUARDS. WE GUARD THE DWARVEN BORDERS.

YEAH, THANKS, I THINK THEY GOT IT.

OUR ORDERS ARE SIMPLE.

THAT MUST BE A RELIEF TO YOU.

WE'RE TO KILL ANY ELVES ON SIGHT WITHOUT QUESTION.

WHICH IS FAIRLY REDUNDANT SINCE ANY DWARF WOULD DO THAT ANYWAY

BUT A PAYCHECK IS A PAYCHECK.

NO ARGUMENT HERE

SO, ANY OF YOU GUYS ELVES?

NOPE.

'CEPT FOR HIM.

GUH?

YAAAAAR!

LEAD!

CHARGE!

TIME FOR PHASE 2 OF MY MASTER INFILTRATION PLAN.

BACKSTAB!

NOW ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS REPEAT THAT *EVERY* TIME WE COME ACROSS A DWARF.

HOW MANY WOULD THAT BE?

WELL, ACCORDING TO THE LATEST ELVEN INTELLIGENCE, APPROXIMATELY TWELVE MILLION.

I DON'T LIKE THIS PLAN.

OH *HUSH* RED MAGE CAN HEAL YOU UP

BUT THAT DOESN'T STOP IT FROM *HURTING*.

I ADMIT, IF THIS PLAN HAD A FAILING, AND IT DOESN'T, *THAT* WOULD BE IT.

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ALTHOUGH SLAUGHTERING ALL THE DWARVES WE MEET *WOULD* CERTAINLY GET THE JOB DONE, I'VE GOT SOMETHING SIMPLER AND MORE PRACTICAL IN MIND...

WOW THAT SOUNDS EVEN CRAZIER OUT LOUD THAN IT DID IN MY HEAD

ANY-WAY, WE CAN GET THROUGH THIS WITH A LOT LESS BLOOD-SHED--

THANK YOU.

--IF I JUST CAST AN ILLUSION SPELL ON US SO WE ALL LOOK LIKE DWARVES.

OKAY BUT *WHERE* IN THIS PLAN OF YOURS DO WE COMMIT GENOCIDE AGAINST THE DWARVEN NATION?

UM. LATER?

AH. YOU MEAN AFTER WE'VE RECOVERED THE EARTH ORB FOR THE GLORY OF ELF LAND AND CURE THE EARTH-ROT THAT'LL CONSUME THE WORLD OTHERWISE.

YEAH, SURE AFTER *THAT.*

DUPLICITY, GENOCIDE. THIS IS THE KIND OF PLAN I CAN GET BEHIND.

MAKE WITH THE MAGIC ALREDY, DONNA.

DEBORA.

YEAH, NO ONE CARES.

HERE WE GO!

MEANWHILE, AT THE TEMPLE OF FIENDS...

STOP CHASING ME!

I'M FOLLOWING ORDERS FROM THE KING HIM-SELF

DITTO.

AND THEN INSIDE..

GENTLE-MEN, EVIL IS AFOOT!

AND HERE I BEEN THINKIN' IT MORE OF A CLAW

I'M NOT SURE I KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN CORRECTING YOU.

I'M A DARK PRINCE.

I DON'T NEED THIS.

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QUICK QUESTION, RM.

ARE YOU NATURALLY THIS INCOMPETENT, OR DID SOME HORRIBLE ACCIDENT BEFALL YOU? LIKE GETTING HIT BY LIGHTNING WHILE MESSING WITH EXPERIMENTAL SPELL COMPONENTS LATE ONE NIGHT?

IF YOU SPENT MORE TIME ANALYZING MAGICAL FIELDS INSTEAD OF USING HATEFUL WORDS, YOU'D REALIZE THAT MY DISGUISE SPELL WAS A SUCCESS.

AND WHAT A *CLEVER* RUSE YOU'VE CONCOCTED TOO. NO ONE WILL SUSPECT THE LIGHT WARRIORS ARE, IN FACT, THE *LIGHT WARRIORS!*

I DUNNO. I WAS TOO BUSY BEING HATEFUL TO PAY ATTENTION.

WHAT DID I *JUST* SAY?

I CAST AN ILLUSION OVER US SO WE'D APPEAR DWARVEN, BUT WE SEE OUR TRUE SELVES.

WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY SO?

SHEESH. SOME PEOPLE JUST GOTTA BE DIFFICULT

MUST MAINTAIN COMPOSURE. MUST NOT LASH OUT. FATHER WOULD NOT APPROVE...

afoot:

[illegible] development

Upcoming.

a foot:

[illegible]

"SEE, "AFOOT" IS A WORD MEANING "UNDERWAY."

GET IT?

WHILE "A *FOOT*" IS WHAT'S ON THE END OF YOUR LEG.

YAR.

BUT IF EVIL *DO* BE A FOOT, THAT DO BE RUININ' ME SHTICK.

EVIL OUGHT TO BE A CLAW-LIKE DEVICE SAYS I

TIS WHY I GO BY THE PIRATE NAME THE CLAW

YOUR NAME IS BIKKE.

AYE, BUT IN CERTAIN CIRCLES THEY DO BE CALLIN' ME *THE CLAW* ON ACCOUNT OF THE GRUESOME CLAWED DEFORMITY OF ME HAND WHAT WAS CUT OFF IN DEADLY BATTLE

"YOU" "HAVE TWO" REGULAR HUMAN HANDS. I CAN SEE THEM.

THE CLAW!

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WHY DO WE KEEP BIKKE ON THE TEAM ANY-WAY?

HE SHARES COMMON GOALS AND INTERESTS WITH US. PLUS, EVEN WITH HIM, WE'RE STILL ONE SHORT OF A COMPLETE DARK WARRIORS TEAM.

AND I'M A CUTTHROAT, BLOODTHIRSTY PIRATE WHAT DO BE VALUIN' YE LIVES AS ONLY ***SLIGHTLY*** LESS THAN DIRT, AND THE ONLY THING STOPPIN' ME FROM KILLIN' YE OUTRIGHT IS THAT YE PUT ME IN YE LITTLE CLUB, YAR.

AND THERE'S THAT TOO.

I SUBMIT THAT YOU'RE STUPID AND WRONG, RM.

IF YOUR ILLUSION SPELL ALLOWS US TO SEE OUR TRUE SELVES AS A SIDE EFFECT OF DUPING THE REST OF THE WORLD INTO THINKING WE'RE DWARVES, THEN WHY DO WE LOOK LIKE OUR ORDINARY SELVES?

EVERYONE KNOWS THAT VISIONS OF ONE'S TRUE SELF ARE SUPPOSED TO BE TRIPPY AND REVEAL HIDDEN TRUTHS ABOUT ONE'S INNER NATURE.

MAYBE WE ARE WHO WE ARE.

WHOA JUST BLEW MY MIND, MAN.

THUS UNBURDENED BY THE LAYERS OF DECEIT AND THE MASKS OF SOCIETY, WE ARE NOT BOUND BY THE FEARS THAT PLAGUE THE EVERYMAN.

WE MAY THEREFORE EMBRACE THE NIETZSCHEAN SUPER-US.

THAT SOUNDS LIKE THE INGREDIENTS FOR GREAT HEROES LIKE WHAT WE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE.

FIGHTER IS THE ONLY ONE OF US SO UNCOMPLICATED TO BE WHO HE REALLY THINKS HE IS.

AND THAT HAS LESS TO DO WITH MORAL STRENGTH THAN IT DOES WITH A COMPLETE LACK OF INTELLIGENCE

HARDLY WHAT I WOULD CALL A ROAD TO KNOWLEDGE OF THE SELF

OR IT COULD BE THAT YOU'RE TAKING IT TOO LITERALLY THE NATURE OF MY ILLUSION SPELL MAKES IT SO PEOPLE BASICALLY SEE WHAT THEY ***WANT*** TO SEE

DWARVES WANT TO SEE OTHER DWARVES, SO THAT'S WHAT THEY GET IT'S THE PERFECT DISGUISE

THEN WHY ARE YOU STILL WEARING A DRESS?

DON'T JUDGE ME.

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WELL, THERE'S A NICE DWARVEN BORDER TOWN. LET'S DO THIS.

SIX MINUTES, THIRTY-SEVEN SECONDS LATER

AND WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT SPELLS THAT REQUIRE CONCENTRATION TO MAINTAIN THEIR EFFECTS, RM?

"THE IMPORTANT PART IS CONCENTRATING."

GOOD. LET'S TRY THAT ON THE *NEXT* TOWN.

OH THE HUMANITY!

YOU MEAN *DWARFITY*, YOU XENOPHILE!

YOU MEAN ARE-LOVER, YOU WORDOMANGER.

BY MORADIN'S BEARD! WHY DO ONLY OUR HOMES AND CHILDREN BURN!

BECAUSE IT SEEMED EXCESSIVELY CRUEL!

DOINK!

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OKAY, NEW TOWN [illegible] SLATE.

WE CAN GO IN, GET SOME INFO ABOUT WHERE THEY KEEP THE EARTH ORB, AND GET OUT WITHOUT LAYING WASTE TO THOUSANDS OF LIVES.

BUT DO WE WANT TO?

THE [illegible] OF ALL WITNESSES IS NEVER A BAD IDEA.

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE!

OUR SISTER TOWN, BEARDVILLE, IS IN FLAMES!

THERE'S A REALLY FUNNY STORY BEHIND THAT ..

WE, THE BRAVE CITIZENS OF BEARDBURG, MUST COME TO THE AID OF OUR DWARVEN BROTHERS!

SURELY YOU, BEING DWARVES AS WELL, WILL ASSIST US!

NOT A CHANCE, YOU BEARDED FREA--

SMACK!

SORRY, IT WAS A REFLEX.

S'COOL. SO WAS SMACKING YOU.

"NOT A CHANCE, YOU BEARDED FREAK, THAT WE WOULD NOT HELP LIKE SOME GANG OF NON-DWARVES," IS WHAT HE WAS SAYING.

HIGHLY IRREGULAR SMACK-ING, BUT HE DID USE THE PROPER GREETING AND OLDE SPEAKE SYNTAXE

YES, YOU ARE CLEARLY MY COUNTRY- [illegible].

WE SHALL CONTINUE TO BEARDVILLE WHILE YOU BEARDED FREAKS REST IN OUR UNGUARDED HOMES BEFORE MAKING THE TREK YOUR-SELVES.

UNGUARDED, EH?

ONE QUICK QUESTION. WOULD ANYONE IN THIS TOWN HAPPEN TO KNOW WHERE THEY KEEP THE EARTH ORB?

NO AND I'M OFF!

WELL, THIS TOWN IS UTTERLY USE-LESS TO US [illegible].

EVERY-THING I LOVE IS COMBUST-IBLE!

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SEVERAL HOURS LATER.

HARK AND WELL MET, BRAVE ONES.

VERILY, YON WARRIORS OF BEARDS TRUE—

MAKE IT SO.

YEARGH!!

OKAY THAT'S IT FROM NOW ON, I'M TALKING TO THE DWARVES. YOU TWO CAN'T BE TRUSTED NOT TO BUTCHER THEM.

AND ALL THAT SOOT WAS RUINING MY DRESS

THIS SIMPLY WILL NOT DO

WELL, THAT LAST GUY WAS ASK-ING FOR IT.

CLEARLY

WE'LL DO BETTER NEXT TIME

HONEST

THAT'S WHAT YOU SAID ABOUT THE LAST FOUR TOWNS!

BUT THIS TIME, WE MEAN IT.

HONEST

WHY AREN'T I DEAD YET?

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AND AGAIN.

OKAY WE'VE BEEN OVER THIS A *HUNDRED* TIMES. WE'RE NOT GONNA KILL *ANY* DWARVES. RIGHT?

RIGHT!

DAMMIT, YOU GUYS!

AND AGAIN.

EVERYONE BACKSLIDES. THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT WE LEARN FROM THE EXPERIENCE AND FORGE AHEAD.

RIGHT!

CAN DO!

LET'S GIVE IT ANOTHER SHOT!

ACK! BEARD-SHAPED PARASITES ARE EATING THEIR FACES!

I DON'T THINK THEY'RE REALLY TRYING.

KILL 'EM ALL, LET THE FLAMES SORT IT OUT!

AND AGAIN...

I'M GOING TO BE IN FRONT THIS TIME, SO NO MORE--

FZZZRT!

COME ON. NOW YOU'RE JUST DOING IT TO ANNOY ME. YOU DON'T EVEN *HAVE* HEAT VISION.

MEH.

AND FINALLY, *WAY* OUTSIDE OF THE NEXT TOWN..

MAN, THIS SUCKS

SO YOU SAY THEY KEEP THE EARTH ORB DEEP IN DWARF CASTLE'S KEEP?

YOU'VE BEEN *MOST* HELPFUL.

WHAT A PLEASANT DAY FOR MINING.

SCORE ONE FOR MAGIC!

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DWARF CASTLE, BUILT INTO THE VERY LIVING ROCK OF MT BEARD.

YOUR LORDSHIP! I BRING URGENT NEWS FROM THE WIDTH AND BREADTH OF OUR GREAT KING-DOM.

THEN SPEAK, AND LET MY ROYAL DECREES BE KNOWN

REPORTS ARE STILL COMING IN FROM THE OUTER LANDS, BUT IT SEEMS THAT DWARF LAND HAS BE-FALLEN A HORRIBLE CURSE

YOU MEAN *BESIDES* BEING PLACED SO NEAR THE ELVEN LANDS?

YES.

THIS IS MOST DIRE NEWS INDEED! CONTINUE

A WAVE OF FLASH FIRES HAS SWEPT OVER OUR MIGHTY NATION. THEY BEGAN IN THE BORDER LANDS AND SHOW NO SIGN OF STOPPING.

HERE IS A MAP OF OUR GREAT KINGDOM SHOWING THESE FIRES

youarenex

I TOOK THE LIBERTY OF CONNECTING EACH EVENT IN A KIND OF TIME LINE TO SEE IF WE COULD DISCERN A PATTERN OR THE LIKE

THEY SEEM TO STRIKE AT RANDOM.

AND NOW WE'LL START THE "I"

NUTHIN'

WHAT?

WE CANNOT DISCOUNT THIS AS AN ACT OF NATURE.

OUR COURSE IS CLEAR.

DECLARE WAR ON ELFLAND?

WE'VE BEEN IN AN OPEN STATE OF WAR WITH ELF LAND FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, EVER SINCE THEY MIS-TOOK THE EARTH ORB FOR THEIR OWN ITEM.

NO. WE MUST UNDERTAKE DRASTIC ACTION. WE MUST SEEK OUT THE FABLED SAVIORS OF DWARF LAND THE BEARDED WARRIORS!

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MEANWHILE, N CORNERIA CASTLE ..

- DON'T - GIVE ME A LOOK, DRIZZT. I CAN FEEL YOUR LOOK. THIS IS TOTALLY GOING TO WORK. -

- ANY PLAN THAT RELIES ON THE STUPIDITY OF HUMANS IS ACES WITH ME, BUT I FEEL RIDICULOUS.

YOU'RE AN ELF, I THOUGHT YOU'D BE USED TO IT.

QUIET, YE DOGS! I DO BE HEARIN' FOOTSTEPS. YAR

HM, GOOD TO KNOW

doin' fine!

doin' fine!

ONLY MY PARTICULAR BRAND OF GENIUS COULD DREAM UP SUCH A PERFECT SCHEME!

IF YOU WANT TO BE SNEAKY ABOUT IT, WE COULD GET A LARGE SHEET AND WRITE SOMETHING LIKE "JUST PEACHY" ON ONE SIDE AND HOLD IT UP WHENEVER SOMEONE WALKS BY

WE COULD GO ANYWHERE LIKE THAT

KER-SMACK!

- FINE, - BUT IF ANYONE ASKS, WE'RE GOING TO TELL THEM WE RAIDED THE CASTLE AND SLEW A HUNDRED FOES EACH.

HUSH YE WORD HOLES AND READY THE SHEET!

doin' fine!

doin' fine!

I THINK SHE'S GONE.

doin' fine!

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PUT THE SHEET DOWN.

doin' fine!

WHAT SHEET?

YOU'RE NOT MAKING THIS EASIER ON YOURSELF

doin' fine!

FOLLOW MY LEAD.

AYE! YE GOT US THIS FAR WITH YE PLANS, WHAT COULD POSSIBLY GO [illegible]

MY THOUGHTS EXACTLY!

NOT TERRIBLY SWEET OR AT ALL MERCIFUL LLOLITH, ARE ALL HUMANS BORN THIS WAY?!

DON'T [illegible] OF MY VV NJ[illegible]*

* PRETTY MUCH, YEAH.

SARA! WHAT A SURPRISE TO SEE YOU HERE.

YEAH, WHAT WERE THE ODDS OF ME BEING IN MY HOME.

CRAZY, AIN'T IT?

I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SINCE THAT KIDNAPPING THING.

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO LATELY, GIRL

YAR!

3 SECONDS LATER

WELL, I TOOK SOME SELF DEFENSE REFRESHER COURSES.

I SEE YOU'VE CULTIVATED A NEW BAD GUY VOICE, BUT IT'LL DO YOU LITTLE GOOD IN THE DUNGEON.

AH, BUT THAT ASSUMES YOU CAN BEST ME, A SPIDER STYLE KENSHI-DO MASTER, IN COMBAT.

KENSHIDO, EH?

THAT MUST BE HARD TO DO WITHOUT SWORDS.

FIGHTER!

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THEN HE KNOCKS ON MY DOOR BECAUSE HE HAD A N.GHT-MARE.

BUT YOU WERE THE CAPT-IVE.

AS I'VE SAID, AND AS I'M SURE YOU'VE PERSONALLY WITNESSED, GARLAND ISN'T VERY GOOD AT WHAT HE DOES.

THAT'S SOMEWHAT LIKE SAYING A FLOOD IS WET.

YOU KNOW THIS WHOLE BEDSHEET THING WAS HIS IDEA.

AND IT SHOWS SO MUCH IMPROVE-MENT I MEAN THAT

THAT'S SO SAD.

I'M THIS CLOSE TO BEING PROUD OF HIM.

AHHH.

QUIET, DOG! OR YOU'LL TASTE FROM MY HEEL!

BUT I ALREADY AM.

IT'S QUITE UN-COMFORT-ABLE.

YES, THAT'S THE IDEA.

MEANWHILE, IN BEARDON A TOWN SQUARE .

WANTED:

YE OLDE BEARDED WARRIORS OF VIRTRUE TRUE FOR SA OF DWARVEN KINGDO

EXCELLENT BENEFITS PACKAGE

THIS SIGN GIVES ME A GREAT IDEA...

FIRE WOOD?

WARRIORS FOR SAVING KINGDOM

PACKAGE

TWO GREAT, YET MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE, IDEAS.

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To: brian@nuklearpower.com
From: blackmage4eva@randomemail.com
Subject: FFX-2

Brian,

If you have played it, what do you think of Final Fantasy X-2? I'm curious what you think of the gameplay since it seems to rely on the Job System you enjoy. Also, I'm curious what you think about the unprecedented nature of an actual FF game that's narratively connected to another

Thanks,

Harvey

p.S. Please include more King Steve. He is the best character.

To: blackmage4eva@randomemail.com
From: brian@nuklearpower.com
Subject: Re: FFX-2

Harvey,

I refuse to play Final Fantasy X-2. If Square-Enix thinks I'm stupid enough to give them fifty bucks so I can play Pretty Princess Dress Me Up for 40 hours, they are sadly mistaken.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to get back to hunting critters in FFXI so I can level up and put on the new jacket, pants, boots, gloves, hat, and cape I bought for 15,000 gil total! I'll be the most beautiful Galka at the Windurst Ball!

Buy a T-shirt,

Brian

P.S. Only an idiot would want more King Steve.

SO YOU SEE, WE ARE ***CLEARLY*** THE CHOSEN WARRIORS YOU HAVE SOUGHT IN YOUR HOPELESS HOUR OF DESPERATE NEED

YOU ***DO*** HAVE BEARDS.

YES. BEARDS ARE WHAT WE HAVE.

YOU'RE CERTAINLY UNDER NO "ILLUSIONS" WHEN IT COMES TO THAT OBSERVATION.

WHY, I COULD THINK OF NO MORE RIGOROUS A SCREENING METHOD MYSELF. LET'S SIGN THE PAPERS OR WHATEVER

WELL, THERE ARE THE ***FOUR HUNDRED BEARDED TRIALS OF STRENGTH*** TO DO

THOSE SOUND MASSIVELY UNIMPORTANT

IT'S A FANCY OBSTACLE COURSE THAT DOUBLES AS THE CASTLE'S GARDEN.

LEGENDS SAY WHOMSOEVER SURVIVES THE TRIALS IS DESTINED TO BECOME DWARF LAND'S TRUE PROTECTOR.

YEAH, THAT'S DEFINITELY A FORMALITY. IT'LL JUST COMPLICATE AN OTHERWISE SIMPLE PROCESS OF ELIMINATION.

OH NO, THE TRIALS HAVE MADE IT A ***VERY*** SIMPLE PROCESS THUS FAR

YOU CAN WATCH THEM THROUGH THAT WINDOW

THERE APPEAR TO BE... BLOOD STAINS THAT EXTEND ONLY ABOUT FIVE FEET FROM THE STARTING POINT

INDEED! THE TRIALS ARE ***GRUESOMELY*** EFFICIENT

SHALL WE CONTACT YOUR NEXT OF KIN NOW, OR WERE THEY ALL ROASTED ALIVE LIKE SO MANY OTHERS?

EXCUSE US FOR A MOMENT, YOUR KINGSHIP.

WE CAN'T GO THROUGH THOSE TRIALS AND ***LIVE***

EVEN IF I HAD, SAY, AN HOUR TO PLAN--

I CALCULATE WE'D LOSE AT ***LEAST*** TWO-THIRDS OF THE PARTY IN A BEST CASE SCENARIO.

WHICH IS THE MOST A BRILLIANT INTELLECT SUCH AS MINE WOULD NEED TO OVERCOME A MERE FOUR-HUNDRED IMPOSSIBLE TRIALS--

THERE'S FOUR OF US HOW COULD WE POSSIBLY LOSE TWO-THIRDS?

ER, IT'S NOT THE PRETTIEST PLAN...

BUT IT'S THE MOST FAVORABLE ONE FOR THE REMAINING 2.6 WARRIORS OF LIGHT

PLAN, SHMAN.

IF THERE'S ONE THING I'M MORE EFFICIENT IN THAN ANYTHING ELSE, IT'S GRUESOMENESS.

STAND BACK AND DON'T LET THE MAGICAL BACKLASH VAPORIZE YOUR INTERNAL LIQUIDS.

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EXPLODE

OBSTACLE COURSE? MO' LIKE KA-BOOM COURSE.

WOW NO ONE'S TRIED *THAT* BEFORE.

THAT'S BECAUSE THEY WEREN'T BEARDED WARRIORS LIKE US.

THAT'S A POINT

YES, AND ONE WITH NO VEILED MEANINGS EITHER.

NOW LET'S MAKE THIS OFFICIAL SO WE CAN START OUR QUEST TO SAVE YOUR--UH, *OUR* LAND

I CAN ONLY IMAGINE THAT THE EARTH ORB ITSELF IS DIRECTLY INVOLVED, SO FEEL FREE TO DELIVER THAT TO US POST HASTE

THE EARTH ORB, YOU SAY? THAT IS... PROBLEMATIC.

IS IT SO MUCH TO ASK FOR A THANK YOU? IS IT?

LOUSY INGRATES.

YOU KNOW, 1.3 IS THE REMAINDER OF TWO-THIRDS OF FOUR NOT 2.6.

AH *NERTS*, I SLIPPED

WHY DO I HAVE THE SUDDEN FEELING THAT THE MOST WONDERFUL PERIOD OF MY LIFE HAS COME CRASHING TO AN END BEFORE I LEARNED TO APPRECIATE IT?

NOW IT'S *YOUR* TURN TO PLAY THE QUIET GAME, BLACK MAGE.

PLAY THE WHAT?

YOU LOSE! MAN, THAT WAS THE EASIEST... UH, WHATEVER IT IS I GET BY WINNING THAT I EVER... UH, WON.

YOUR WORDS ARE FIRE GIANTS BESIEGING THE ASGARD OF MY MIND.

YEAH, I MISSED ME TALKING TOO.

LEMME MAKE UP FOR LOST TIME!

FIRST I THOUGHT ...NG TO LOSE THE QUIET GAME 'C... MUCH SMARTER THAN ME, BU... TO MYSELF, 'SELF, YOU'VE ...OMPLETE LACK OF INTELLIGEN... BEFORE, AND YOU'RE NOT ABL... ...O THERE I WAS, IN THE MIDDLE OF ... ...HOSE BURNING DWARF GUYS—MAN, DID... ...BY SMELL BAD OR WHAT— AND I KEPT T... ...I SHOULD TELL YOU TO STOP, BU... ...YOU THAT'S WHAT YOU WANTED ...COULD WIN THE QUIET GAME SO ... A WORD 'CAUSE I WAS A SMARTY ... SURE THOSE DWARVES ARE FAN... ...H. SHEESH, HOW LONG DID IT T... ...ET ALL THAT UP AHEAD OF TIME ... ALMOST HAD ME, BUT I ...

PLEASE DON'T. IT'S NOT NECESSARY IT'S *VERY* NOT NECESSARY

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MUST WE EMPLOY THE EARTH ORB?

HEY WE DON'T TELL YOU HOW TO GOVERN, AND YOU DON'T TELL *US* HOW TO BE SAVIORS. GOT IT?

AL- THOUGH SOME OF US HAVE ***FASCINATING*** THEORIES REGARDING ISSUES AS DIVERSE AS TAXATION AND HOW TO PROPERLY SURRENDER TO THE ELVEN RACE.

LET'S NOT GET OURSELVES ***KILLED***, MISTER ZEALOUS BIGOT IN UNFRIENDLY TERRITORY. 'KAY?

THEY'RE ***DWARVES***.

WE NEED ONLY CLIMB A TREE OR SET FIRE TO THEIR HOMES TO GET AWAY

WE HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR FROM THEM.

I DON'T TELL YOU HOW TO STEAL, AND YOU DON'T TELL ME HOW TO DIPLOMATIFY

YOUR ONE LINE IS THE "I DON'T TELL YOU/YOU DON'T TELL ME" THING.

OH YEAH, ***YOU'RE*** B.G THE FANCY NEGOTIATOR, SORRY.

BUT PLEASE, BY ALL MEANS, CONTINUE TO DO SOMETHING YOU CAN'T PROPERLY CONJUGATE.

THANK YOU, I WILL.

WHAT WAS ALL THAT?

UH, WELL IT, UM..

WAY TO CHOKE, SMART GUY!

UM, IMPORTANT BEARDED [redacted] TALK.

SOUNDS IMPORTANT

QUITE. NOW, ABOUT THAT EARTH ORB YOU WERE ABOUT TO HAND OVER WITHOUT QUESTION

THE THING IS... WE DON'T HAVE THE EARTH ORB ANY MORE.

DUN DUN DUNNNN!

ER... SORRY. DO GO ON

MORON!

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DEAR GARLAND AND FRIENDS,

HOW ARE YOU? I AM FINE

PLEASE ATTACK CORNERIA CASTLE SO THAT I MAY DECLARE WAR ON SOME UNSUSPECTING NATION TO DISTRACT EVERYONE FROM THE ABYSMAL JOB I'M DOING AS KING GUY THANKS.

YOUR PAL

KING STEVE

P.S. DON'T TELL ANYONE

THE NEXT TIME MY DAD UNDERTAKES A CLANDESTINE SCHEME OF INTERNATIONAL PROPORTIONS, HE SHOULD BE A BIT MORE CAREFUL ABOUT THE PAPER TRAIL.

SEE, WE'RE ACTING UPON ROYAL DECREE YOU CAN'T HURT US.

LEASTWISE, NOT MUCH MORE THAN YE ALREADY HAVE.

AND HE NEEDS TO MAKE FRIENDS WITH SOME OTHER SUPERVILLAINS. YOU GUYS ARE *SAD*

YAR, TIS TRUE ME HEART DO BE ACHING FOR THE SEA.

MEANWHILE, IN DWARF LAND

IT'S TRUE. REPORTS ARE SPOTTY AT BEST, BUT SOME YEARS AGO A HORRIBLE MANIFESTATION OF DARKNESS ITSELF STOLE INTO THIS VERY CASTLE AND [illegible] ORB.

IT KILLED EVERY BRAVE DWARF THAT STOOD IN ITS WAY COMING AND GOING.

NO, THAT'S NOT WHAT I.. LOOK, NEVER MIND *LEAVE.*

BUT WE HAVE... A PROPOS-ITION.

AND NATURALLY, WE SUSPECTED IT WAS AN ELVEN PLOY... BUT THE CREATURE HAS REMAINED IN DWARF LAND ALL THIS TIME.

THAT LYING ABOMIN-ATION, WE KNEW IT COULD NOT BE TRUSTED!

WHAT AN ODD THING TO SAY

YEAH, SOMETIMES HE SPOUTS RANDOM STRINGS OF WORDS.

IT'S ALL QUITE RANDOM AND MEANING-LESS.

EVEN THOUGH THAT WAS A COMPLETE SENTENCE AND IT FIT PERFECTLY IN CONTEXT

YES.

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A PROPOSITION? WHAT, ARE YOU GOING TO ASK ME TO THE VILLAIN'S PROM?

BUT YOU TOLD ME YOU WERE GOING TO WASH YOUR HAIR.

SPEAK ANOTHER WORD AND I SHALL SEE TO IT THAT YOUR LIFE WILL BECOME A TRAGICALLY EXTENDED PERIOD OF CONSTANT SUFFERING.

AH, SO DIFFICULT TO FIND GOOD HELP THESE DAYS.

I HATE MY LIFE!

THEN STOP RUNNING

QUITE.

WE ARE NOT LIKE THESE OTHERS, PRINCESS. WE'RE A CUT ABOVE THE COMMON MUD THESE INSIPID FOOLS WERE SCULPTED FROM.

AREN'T YOU MIXING YOUR CREATION METAPHORS?

WE ARE OF ROYAL BLOOD.

I'VE GOT THIS THEORY THAT ROYAL BLOOD IS NOT INHERENTLY SUPERIOR TO THAT OF, SAY, AN ARTIFICER

BUT... THAT DOESN'T... THAT, THAT'S COMPLETE *NONSENSE*. ROYALTY *MUST* BE SUPERIOR, IT'S WHAT MAKES US THE RULERS.

IT'S DIFFICULT TO HOLD HIGH OPINIONS OF ROYALTY AND DIVINE RIGHT TO RULE WHEN YOU LIVE WITH MY FATHER

DID I EVER TELL YOU ABOUT THE TIME I *BUILT* THIS CASTLE ALL BY HAND?

IT'S 400 YEARS OLD, DAD

YES, YES. I DESIGNED IT THAT WAY, YOU KNOW

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YOUR FATHER'S MAD RAMBLING ASIDE, I BELIEVE WE COULD RULE THE DARK [illegible]!

JOIN ME, AND BIKKE AND GARLAND WILL BE OUR UNWITTING ERRAND BOYS OF EVIL!

WITH YOUR STUNNING GOOD LOOKS AND MY NATURAL GENIUS—DUE TO BEING MALE—THE WORLD WILL COWER BEFORE US!

WHAT SAY YOU, SARA?

BWA HAHAHAHA

HAHAHAHAHA

HAHAHAHAHA

HAHAHAHAHA

SHE JUST NEEDS SOME TIME TO THINK ABOUT IT.

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AT DINNER...

OH MERCY... HEH, CAN YOU IMAGINE? ME, JOIN THEM? HA!

I *INVENTED* IMAGINATION, YOU KNOW

THAT NIGHT..

WHAT WOULD POSSES THEM TO THINK OF SOMETHING SO STUPID?

I MEAN THERE'S OBVIOUSLY THEIR SEEMINGLY END-LESS CAPACITY FOR STUPID THOUGHTS, BUT ONE WOULD THINK EVEN *THAT* WOULD HAVE CERTAIN CON-STRAINTS.

KING STEVE'S KICK ASS RUMPUS ROOM

KING STEVE'S KICK ASS RUMPUS ROOM

SHE'S MULLING IT OVER

THE NEXT MORNING

THERE AREN'T WORDS FOR IT. THERE CAN'T BE

A LANGUAGE IS BUILT ON THE EXPERIENCES OF ITS SPEAKERS

IT'S LIKE HOW THE ESKIMOES HAVE A HUNDRED WORDS FOR SNOW

ITS SPEAKERS WOULD HAD TO HAVE BEEN TOO STUPID TO SURVIVE LONG ENOUGH TO DEVELOP ENOUGH FOREBRAIN TO HAVE A LANGUAGE IN THE FIRST PLACE!

A LANGUAGE COULDN'T HAVE WORDS TO DESCRIBE HOW STUPID THIS IS.

TSK. I WISH SHE'D MAKE UP HER MIND ALREADY! WE CAN'T WAIT ALL DAY FOR THIS.

WE DON'T HAVE TO TAKE THIS. WE HAVE OUR DIGNITY!

YE BE SPEAKIN' FOR YESELF, ELFY!

A MEAL THAT COSTS MY DIG-NITY IS STILL FREE.

HAVE GOT TO FIND NEW, NON-SUCKY, FRIENDS.

THE PREVIOUS AFTERNOON, IN DWARF LAND..

OKAY, SO RUN THIS IDIOTIC PLAN BY ME ONE MORE TIME.

THE DWARF KING SAID THAT THIS THING THAT STOLE THE EARTH ORB IS A "NIGHT CREATURE"

THEREFORE, LOGICALLY, IT CAN ONLY BE CONFRONTED AT NIGHT

OH. I TAKE IT BACK, THAT ACTUALLY MAKES PERFECT SENSE. I MEAN, HOW MANY NIGHT CREATURES DO YOU SEE DURING THE DAY? NONE AT ALL.

PRECISELY MY POINT

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT A NIGHT CREATURE WOULD PROBABLY BE WEAKENED DURING THE DAY

I DON'T FOLLOW

THINK OF THE SEA CREATURE THAT IS FEARSOME UNDER THE WAVES, BUT POWERLESS ON LAND

WHAT DOES WATER HAVE TO DO WITH ANYTHING?

I WAS USING METAPHOR

"I WAS USING METAPHOR." SOMEONE SHUT HIM UP BEFORE I USE A KNIFE

NOW. NOW. THERE WILL BE PLENTY OF TIME FOR RUTHLESS BACKSTABBING ONCE WE GET THE EARTH ORB.

ER, I SHOULD'VE SAID THAT IN WHISPER MODE..

MEANWHILE, BACK AT DWARF CASTLE..

YOUR FACIAL HAIR IS HARDLY DESTINED AT ALL. BE GONE, YOU CHARLATANS!

"LET'S TAKE A SHORTCUT THROUGH ELF LAND," YOU SAID "IT'S NICE AT THIS TIME OF YEAR, WHAT COULD GO WRONG," YOU SAID. YOU ***SUCK***, BARRY

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BLACK MAGE! BLACK MAGE! BLACK MAGE!
OH, JEEZ WHAT NOW?!
I GOT A PRESENT FOR YOU! OPEN IT!
YOU RE FUGGIN KIDDING ME
IT'S STAFF-CHUCKS! I MADE THEM FOR YOU MY-SELF CAUSE YOU CAN'T USE SWORDS
SOMETIMES, FIGHTER, YOU AMAZE ME TWO MAGIC STAVES ON A CHAIN?. HOW CAN YOU KEEP COMING UP WITH IDEAS THIS STUPID?
IT'S A GIFT
MAGIC IS ABOUT SKILL AND CONTROL. NOT JUST SLINGING SPELLS AROUND LIKE SWORDS! WHAT KIND OF USELESS, MORONIC-
awww YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE
YOU RE WELCOME

WE JOIN KING STEVE AND HIS NEW LEFT HAND MAN GARY (GARY IS HIS LEFT HAND MAN BECAUSE HIS RIGHT HAND MAN IS NOW, AND ALWAYS WILL BE, RODNEY THE COFFEE STAIN) WALKING IN THE LUXURIOUS AND OFT UNKEPT CASTLE GARDENS

Ruler Steve Nukearpower

LEFT HAND MAN GARY, LOOK AT MY SHOES.

AREN'T THEY FANTASTIC?

HIGHNESS, I FIND MYSELF BEING DRAWN TO COMPLIMENTING YOUR SHOES

THANK YOU, LEFTY! YES, THEY'RE QUITE NICE, AND VERY COMFORTABLE. *VERY* EXPENSIVE TOO.

THAT WOULD EXPLAIN THE OSCENE SUM OF MONEY THAT'S GONE MISSING FROM THE TREASURY

INDEED

THESE SHOES WEREN'T CHEAP

THEY'RE MADE FROM BABY SKIN.

FRESH DAILY

ACTUALLY, SIRE, THAT'S SOMETHING I WANTED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT

EVEN THOUGH THOSE SHOES (WHICH, I MUST SAY, ARE THE NICEST SHOES I HAVE EVER SEEN IN MY LIFE) ARE WONDEFUL THEY'RE ALSO QUITE DISTURBING.

THEY SOUND OF BABIES CRYING WITH EVERY STEP.

OF COURSE, FOOL! WHY DO YOU THINK THEY COST SO VERY *VERY* MUCH?

FORGIVE ME, SIRE.

YOUR WISDOM IS ETERNAL.

BY MICHAEL BUONAURO AND BRIAN CLEVINGER
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DO YOU REMEBER THAT GIRL, RODNEY? WHAT *WAS* HER NAME?

AH, YES, REBECCA! QUITE A TIME WE HAD WITH HER, EH RODNEY?

IT WAS YOUR BIRTHDAY, AS I RECA...

YOU HAD JUST HAD YOUR BARMITZVAH, AND WE WERE LIGHTING FIRE-WORKS, AS WAS CUSTOM-ARY IN THOSE DAYS.

DAD, HAVE YOU SEEN MY--

NO, RODNEY, I THINK IT WAS YOU, IN FACT, WHO TAUGHT HER TO SING I REMEMBER WE WROTE A LENGTHY EPIC POEM ON THE SUBJECT, SOMETHING LIKE--OH, HELLO DEAR!

DEAR? SARA?

ARE YOU QUITE ALRIGHT?

RODNEY, GET LEFT HAND MAN GARY! TELL HIM HE'S THE CHEIF MEDICAL OFFICER AND HAVE HIM COME HERE AT ONCE

RODNEY?

RODNEY! GOODNESS, NO! IT'S A PLAUGE! I HOPE I DON'T CATCH IT TOO!

I HOPE SHE SENDS SOME HELP

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SIRE, SIRE! THE CASTLE IS ON FIRE! ***THE CASTLE IS ON FIRE!***

NONSENSE.

SIRE, WE HAVE TO EVACUATE! EVERYONE HAS ALREADY LEFT, ONLY YOU AND I REMAIN!

YOU AND I ***AND***...

YOU AND I AND ***RODNEY*** REMAIN, SIRE. BUT WE MUST GO!

THE.. ***THREE*** OF US NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE THE CASTLE BURNS DOWN AROUND US!

FAITHFUL LEFTY, ANSWER ME A QUESTION. WHY DO DOGS CHASE CATS?

SIRE, I HARDLY THINK THIS IS THE TIME FOR--

ANSWER!

DOG! CHASE CATS UM, BECAUSE... I DON'T KNOW WHY!

DOGS CHASE CATS BECAUSE THEY RUN.

THEY CHASE THEM BECAUSE THEY ***RUN***

THINK ABOUT THAT AND YOU'LL HAVE YOUR ANSWER, LEFTY.

I'M SORRY, PRINCESS, BUT HE REFUSED TO LEAVE. THERE WAS NOTHING I COULD DO.

HAS ANYONE SEEN MY PIPE?

I LEFT IT NEAR THE BLACK POWDER ROOM AND.. WHAT'S EVERYONE DOING OUT HERE?

ARE WE HAVING A PICNIC? HMM, NO, THIS ISN'T TUESDAY

SOMEHOW THIS DOESN'T SURPRISE ME

SURPRISE YOU? IS IT YOUR BIRTHDAY? HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DEAR! I LOVE YOU!

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WELL, THIEF, SINCE IT SEEMS YOUR PEOPLE HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH THIS NIGHT CREATURE, IS THERE ANYTHING YOU CAN TELL US ABOUT IT?

IT FEEDS UPON THE LIVING FOR IT IS NOT ACTUALLY ALIVE.

LIGHT IS ANATHEMA TO IT

IT WAS THE PERFECT ASSASSIN AND THIEF ROLLED INTO ONE.

IT COULDN'T BE KILLED OR TRACKED AND DARKNESS ITSELF WAS ITS HOME.

STILL, IT FAILED IN ITS CLANDESTINE MISSION TO RETRIEVE THE EARTH ORB FOR ELF LAND ALL THOSE YEARS AGO.

WE ASSUMED, RATHER NATURALLY, THAT THIS FAILURE WAS DUE TO THE CREATURE BEING NON-ELVEN.

OF COURSE

BUT NOW IT SEEMS THAT THE CREATURE HAD ITS OWN AGENDA AND, IN A SURPRISINGLY ELF-LIKE MOVE, IT BACKSTABBED US.

I KNOW NOT OF ITS ABILITIES, BUT A SMALL FORTUNE WAS PAID FOR ITS SERVICES.

ALL I CAN SAFELY SAY IS THAT WE ARE UP AGAINST ONE OF THE PUREST MANIFESTATIONS OF EVIL IN THE WORLD.

HEY, WHEN DO YOU PLAN TO RETURN MY CURE ALBUMS?

SULK WOULD NEED BORROW CAR FROM MOM. SHE NOT UNDERSTAND SULK'S PAIN, SO SULK GROUNDED

THAT'S EXACTLY WHY I MOVED OUT OF MY PARENTS HOUSE.

ALBERT, TAKE OUT THE TRASH!

I'M NOT GOING TO ASK YOU AGAIN.

AND INTO THEIR BASEMENT

I'LL BE RIGHT UP, MOM! I'M TALKING TO MY FRIENDS, THEY UNDERSTAND ME!

TELL SULK WE'RE HAVING MEAT LOAF IF HE WANTS TO COME OVER FOR DINNER.

YOU DON'T KNOW ME ON THE INSIDE!

MEATLOAF? SULK WILL ASK MOM

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KAT: YOU SURE THIS IS THE PLACE?

THIS IS 667 DARKNESS LANE

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MAYBE WE'VE GOT THE WRONG HOUSE.

PERHAPS THEY HEARD WE WERE COMING AND THEY BUILT HASTILY THIS INCREDIBLY CONVINCING FACSIMILE OF AN ORDINARY HOME TO HIDE THEIR PIT OF DEATH!

THEY WOULDN'T HAVE HAD TIME TO MAKE ALL OF THIS.

GOOD POINT. THE ONLY OTHER EXPLANATION IS THAT THIS IS A HARD LIGHT HOLOGRAPHIC PROJECTION.

THIS IS SO SIMPLE.

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WE'RE HERE. WE CAN'T CHANGE THAT THIS HOUSE MAY OR MAY NOT BE THE DEN OF EVIL WE WERE LOOKING FOR. WE CAN'T CHANGE THAT EITHER.

ALL WE CAN DO IS CHOOSE HOW TO ACT BEST IN THE SITUATION GIVEN TO US.

IN THAT LIGHT, I BELIEVE IT WOULD BE IRRESPONSIBLE OF US ***NOT*** TO BARGE INTO THIS HOUSE AND MASSACRE THE PEOPLE INSIDE.

I DON'T FOLLOW

THAT'S BECAUSE YOUR EXISTENCE IS WHOLLY WITHOUT MERIT BUT I'LL EXPLAIN IT ANYWAY.

SLOWLY

IF THIS ***IS*** THE RIGHT PLACE, THEN WE WILL BE COMPLETELY JUSTIFIED IN SLAUGHTERING THE OCCUPANTS THEREIN.

IF IT'S ***NOT*** THE RIGHT PLACE, IT'LL BE A PRACTICE SESSION. AS WE ALL KNOW, PRACTICE SESSIONS DON'T COUNT, SO WE'LL BE ABSOLVED OF ANY ALLEGED CRIMES.

BUT YOU'RE GOING TO KILL THEM EVEN IF THEY'RE INNOCENT

AND IT'S ***PRACTICE***, SO IT WON'T COUNT

BUT THEY'LL BE DEAD

HEY, THEY KNEW THE RISKS WHEN THEY TOOK THE JOB.

JOB?! ***RISKS***? YOU'RE A MASS-MURDERING PSYCHO.

IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT, THAT'S REALLY ***THEIR*** PROBLEM.

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OKAY, IT'S TIME TO INTRODUCE THESE PEOPLE TO THE WORST DAY OF THEIR LIVES.

FIGHTER, SWORD, DOOR. GO.

YOU GOT IT!

I'VE BEEN WAITING A LONG TIME FOR THIS...

SHOW!

WHY DON'T WE USUALLY SEE THOSE SWORDS? AND WHY ARE THEY THE WRONG IMAGES?

HUSH, IT'S A CINEMATIC SCENE. HE'S ALLOWED TO LOOK BETTER.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

JUST A MOMENT!

SHE'LL BE RIGHT OUT

THAT'S... NOT WHAT I HAD IN MIND.

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VILBERT, HONEY, YOUR FRIENDS ARE HERE

MOM! HOW MANY TIMES MUST I ASK YOU TO REFER TO ME BY MY DARK NAME OF THE DAMNED?

HOW MANY TIMES MUST I ASK YOU TO TAKE OUT THE GAR-BAGE?

I'M DOING IT RIGHT NOW GEEZ!

THIS ***CAN'T*** BE THE RIGHT PLACE.

THE LITTLE SIGN ABOVE THE FRONT DOOR SAID "VON VAMPIRE RES-IDENCE"

OH PLEASE THAT DOESN'T PROVE ANYTHING.

IT'S ONLY A LAST NAME IT'S NOT LIKE FIGHTER'S LAST NAME IS KNIGHT

YEAH, MY LAST NAME IS MCWARRIOR ***DUH.***

AND YOUR LAST NAME IS EVIL-WIZARDING-TON

SO MUCH SUFFER-ING SHALL BE VISITED UPON YOU...

OH, WOW! YOU MUST BE THE GUYS LARRY GOT TO PLAY THE NPCS AT TONIGHT'S LIVE ACTION ROLEPLAY SESSION.

LIVE ACTION...? THESE WORDS ARE LIKE SUNSHINE BEING BEAMED INTO MY VERY SOUL!

WHY DO I SUDDENLY FEEL LIKE A YOUNG BOY FROM A PRIMITIVE FISHING VILLAGE BORN WITH SUCH INNATE MUSICAL GENIUS AS THE WORLD HAS NEVER KNOWN WHO—

—ONE GLORIOUS MORNING—

—FINDS A HARPSICHORD WASHED UP ON SHORE AND KNOWS THEN THAT HIS LIFE UP UNTIL THAT MOMENT HAS BEEN A WASTE?

THE MORE HE TALKS, THE MORE HE WEIRDS ME OUT

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THOSE ARE GREAT COSTUMES.

YES, COSTUMES ARE WHAT THESE ARE.

AND THEY *ARE* GREAT

YOU EVEN GOT THE SMELLY WIZARD'S STINK THAT'S WHAT I CALL DEDI-CAT.ON.

WHY IS EVERYONE LOOKING AT ME WHEN HE IS ***CLEARLY*** SPEAKING OF RM!?

OH, YES.

OBVIOUSLY.

I WAS LOOKING THROUGH YOU AT HIM WITH MY NEWLY DIS-COVERED AND PROMPTLY LOST X-RAY VISION.

I FIND THOSE TO BE SUITABLE EXCUSES.

YOUR STABBINGS HAVE BECOME SLIGHTLY LESS IMMINENT

WE'VE GOT SOME TIME BEFORE THE LARP

MY MOM COULD DRIVE US TO THE SHOP-MART AND WE COULD HANG OUT WITH THE OTHER GOTH K.DS

THIS IS DWARF LAND. YOU DON'T GET MANY BROODERS HERE.

THEY'RE LESS ABOUT MOPING AND MORE ABOUT HACKING YOUR LEGS OFF AT THE KNEES.

IN ALL HONESTY, THE ONLY OTHER GOTH KID IS .ARRY, WHOM YOU'VE AL.READY MET

AND HIS HEART'S REAL.Y NOT .NTO IT

HE'S A ZOMBIE, SO Y'KNOW, YOU CAN'T TELL IF HE'S SHAMBLING DUE TO THE UNBEARABLE ENNUI OF EXISTENCE OR BECAUSE HIS .EGS DON'T WORK

ALAS, MY .ONELY, M.S-UNDERSTOOD FATE IN THIS WORLD HAS MADE ME LONG FOR THE SWEET EMBRACE OF DEATH.

I FEEL A POEM COMING ON

CAN WE KILL HIM NOW?

HE'S A GOTH, IT'S WHAT HE WANTS.

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OKAY, LET'S JUMP 'IM.

OH YEAH, *THAT'S* A GREAT PLAN.

YES, I KNOW THAT'S WHY I THOUGHT OF IT.

I WAS BEING SARCASTIC, FOOL.

ARE YOU SURE?

YES!

YOU MEAN *NOW* YOU ARE.

NO, *THEN* I WAS.

THEN JUST *NOW* OR THEN BACK *THEN*?

WHAT ARE WE TALK-ING ABOUT ANY MORE?

OH YEAH, LIKE *YOU* DON'T KNOW

WHAT?

I WAS BEING SARCASTIC.

ABOUT WHAT?!

OKAY, NEW PLAN.

FIRST, YOU TWO SHUT UP

SECOND, WE KILL EVERY *NON*-LIGHT WARRIOR IN THIS HOUSE, TAKE THE EARTH ORB AND RETURN IT TO ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE IN ELF LAND

GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME

VILBERT, WE'LL KILL YOU FIRST SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO WATCH US PAINT THE WALLS WITH YOUR MOTHER'S INTERNAL ORGANS.

NO ROUGH-HOUSING INDOORS!

YES, MRS. VON VAMPIRE

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OKAY, LET'S GET SOME PRACTICE IN BEFORE THE GAME.

YOU DON'T REALLY *PRACTICE* BLEEDING TO DEATH FROM SIX DOZEN STAB WOUNDS. IT'S JUST GONNA HAPPEN.

YES, BUT THE GAME, MUCH LIKE THE EMPTINESS THAT IS LIFE, WOULD BE UNFAIR IF PLAYED THAT WAY

SO THERE'S A SYSTEM IN PLACE TO PREVENT CHEATING

HA! SYSTEMS ARE *MADE* TO BE CHEATED!

ALL CONFLICTS ARE RESOLVED WITH A SIMPLE MATCH OF ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS. TO THE VICTOR GO THE SPOILS

WHO WANTS TO GO FIRST?

SO THIS GUY THINKS A GAME IS GOING TO KILL HIM?

THIS AIN'T THE MATRIX.

FOLLOW THE WHITE RABBIT

MOVE IT, JERK-ASS!

WELL, WE HAVE AN IDIOT WHO IS CONVINCED THAT REALITY OBEYS SOME *CRAZY* SET OF UNSPOKEN YET UNIVERSALLY FOLLOWED RULES. LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE UP, RM.

I'VE GOT A GREAT PLAN. I HAVE DUBBED IT *PLAN AWESOME*

OH, DON'T TELL ME.

YOU'RE GOING TO TRIP AND "ACCIDENTALLY" FALL SUCH THAT YOUR NECK JUST HAPPENS TO GET PIERCED BY HIS FANGS.

THEN YOU CAN BECOME AN UNDEAD BLIGHT FOR THE SAKE OF GAINING ALL KINDS OF "STAT BONUSES"

THOSE WILL BE USED TO BOOST YOUR ALREADY IMPRESSIVE AND VERSATILE ARRAY OF ABILITIES AND DEFEAT OUR FOE.

NO, NO, NO. BUT I WANT TO CHANGE IT TO *PLAN AWESOME-B* FOR REASONS UNRELATED TO WHAT YOU JUST SAID.

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READY?

I WAS BORN READY

I WAS BORN NAKED AND SCREAMING.

AND IF ALL GOES ACCORDING TO PLAN, YOU'LL *DIE* LIKE THAT TOO.

BLACK MAGE IS MY FRIEND.

ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS, *MATCH!*

ROCK!

NATURAL TWENTY, DOUBLE DAMAGE, I WIN.

I... DON'T THINK THAT'S HOW IT WORKS.

NATURAL TWENTY TRUMPS ALL.

SHOW ME SOMETHING THAT BEATS A NATURAL TWENTY, AND I'LL SHOW YOU HATEFUL *LIES!*

I THINK YOU'RE CONFUSED.

IS IT NOT THE POINT OF THIS CONTEST TO CHOOSE THE ITEM THAT WILL DEFEAT THE OPPONENT'S CHOSEN ITEM?

YEAH, BUT--

IT'S JUST THAT THERE *IS* NO NATURAL TWENTY IN ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS

THAT'S THE SORT OF THING THEY SHOULD'VE WORKED OUT IN THE BETA.

SADLY, FOR YOU, THEY DID NOT

ADVANTAGE, RED MAGE!

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TOGETHER FOR WINDURST
THE SOLDIERS OF WINDURST WILL LIBERATE US WITH GLORY.
IN BASTOK, CHOCOBO RIDES YOU!
STOP SAN D'ORIAN IMPERIALISM!
VICTORY OR DEATH

WELL, NOW THAT YOU HAVE BEEN SUMMARILY DEFEATED, WE DEMAND--

HOW CAN YOU CLAIM THAT AS A LEGITIMATE DEFEAT?!

RATHER SIMPLY

I HAVE A FOREBRAIN, MY ABILITY FOR ABSTRACT THOUGHT ALLOWS FOR ALL KINDS OF THINGS.

THERE ARE NO DICE IN ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS.

I'D LIKE TO DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION TO THE AIR BUD CLAUSE.

THERE IS NO RULE ***SPECIFICALLY*** STATING THAT DICE ARE ***NOT*** VALID CHOICES. SO THERE.

THAT'S MADNESS

THAT'S AIR BUD.

I DON'T KNOW ***WHERE*** LARRY GOT YOU GUYS, BUT HE REALLY SHOULD'VE ASKED IF YOU KNEW ANYTHING ABOUT LARP

IT'S ABOUT SHEDDING YOUR SELF, BECOMING A WHOLE NEW ENTITY!

WHY, TAKE ME FOR EXAMPLE

IN REAL LIFE, I'M A SNOBBISH WANNABE

BUT MY POETRY IS JUST AS BRILLIANT IN BOTH MY LIVES.

IN LARP, I'M AN ELITIST HANGER-ON!

WE'VE INDULGED FRUITCAKE HERE FOR LONG ENOUGH.

OH, BUT I DO EVER SO LOVE BEING INDULGED I'M A GOTH. YOU SEE, I THRIVE ON THE ATTENTION OF OTHERS--

THOUGH THEY BE THE VERY SAME PEOPLE WHOM I MERCILESSLY MOCK FOR NOT UNDERSTANDING ME!

YES, FINE. MORE INDULGING LET'S PLAY YOUR STUPID GAME THEN. READY?

ROCK PAPER SCISSORS IN THE EYE!

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WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

I FELT IT WAS FAIRLY OBVIOUS.

THERE'S NO TOUCHING IN LIVE ACTION ROLE-PLAYING.

AND NO WEAPONS EITHER. SOMEONE COULD'VE BEEN HURT

WELL, YEAH.

IT'S A GOOD THING I'M A VAMPIRE AND IMMUNE TO DAMAGE FROM MUNDANE WEAPONS.

VAMPIRE, EH?

YOU'D NEED TO PUT A STAKE THROUGH MY HEART TO HURT ME.

LUCKILY A KNIFE THROUGH MY FACE AND NECK IS HARMLESS.

A LITTLE TOO LUCKY...

MY MIND IS ABLAZE WITH GENIUS!

WHERE'S HE GOING?

I DUNNO, BUT HE WAS MAKING EVEN LESS SENSE THAN USUAL.

HA! THIS IS *EXACTLY* WHAT I NEED!

GRANK

LOOK, VILBERT, THE TRUTH IS WE'RE LIGHT WARRIORS AND WE'RE NOT VERY GOOD PEOPLE.

WE'RE GOING TO DESTROY YOUR HOME WHETHER OR NOT YOU GIVE US THE EARTH ORB.

IF YOU GIVE US THE ORB, WE'LL MAKE YOUR DEATH AS PAINLESS AS WE CAN.

IF NOT, LET'S JUST SAY YOU'LL BE *ENCOURAGING* US TO TAKE OUR TIME.

WE CAN BE *VERY* METICULOUS. I THINK YOU SHOULD DO WHAT HE SAYS.

SO HELP US HELP YOU, OKAY?

COMPOOM!

A *WOODEN* STAKE!

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE FENCE POST IS FOR?

I'M NOT *STUPID*

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THAT'S NOT A STAKE

WELL NO, NOT YET

CLICK

NOW IT'S WOOD IN STEAK

HOW DID YOU...

IT'S JUST A HALF-CIRCLE FROM BACK TO FRONT SIMPLE.

BUT THAT SPELL IT'S NOT. YOU CAN'T . I DON'T WHAT?

OH DEAR I THINK IT'S FINALLY HAPPENED.

YEARS OF EXPOSURE TO FIGHTER'S, SHALL WE SAY, POINT OF VIEW, HAS RENDERED BLACK MAGE A SPUTTERING VEGETABLE.

YEAH, I DO THAT TO HIM SOMETIMES

HE'LL SNAP OUT OF IT SOON. USUALLY BY WAY OF AN INSATIABLE HOMICIDAL FRENZY, BUT WHAT'DYA GONNA DO ABOUT IT?

WOODEN STAKE

WOOD IN STEAK

SKLORTCH!

OKAY, GUYS. I THINK YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND THE RULES

FIGHTER, FIRST, YOU DIDN'T ENGAGE A PHYSICAL CHALLENGE

THIRD ANNUAL HINDU VEGETARIAN CLUB MEETING

PICNIC AND FUN!

YOU TRY BALANCING A COW ON THE END OF A FENCE POST TO WIELD IT LIKE A CLUB THAT'S A PHYSICAL DAMN CHALLENGE

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LET'S REASSESS THE SITUATION. BLACK MAGE, OUR HEAVY ARTILLERY, IS OUT.

YEAH, SWORD-CHUCKS. *YEAH!*

IT'D BE JUST LIKE HAVING TWO SWORDS, BUT YOU COULD WIELD THEM BOTH WITH ONE HAND

AND THERE'S THE ADDED BENEFIT OF HAVING NO CONTROL OVER EITHER OF THEM!

OF COURSE IT'S A GREAT IDEA, IT ALL MAKES SENSE TO ME NOW

I WAS A FOOL TO EVER DOUBT IT. A DOUBTING FOOL, I TELL YOU!

FIGHTER, OUR MEATSHIELD, IS OTHERWISE OCCUPIED.

I JUST NEED TWO COWS TO BE IMPALED AND SET ON FIRE.

C'MON, JUST STEP FORWARD TO VOLUNTEER

OKAY, JUST MILL AROUND AIMLESSLY TO VOLUNTEER. THANKS!

AND *YOUR* IDIOTIC GAMBIT FAILED MISERABLY

IT'S NOT *MY* FAULT HE FAILED TO RECOGNIZE MY GENIUS

I FIND THAT OFTEN HAPPENS WHEN YOU WORK ON AS MANY LEVELS AS I DO

YEAH I'M SURE THAT'S SOMETHING LIKE A PROBLEM FOR YOU...

INDEED UNFORTUNATELY FOR VILBERT, I'M GOING TO HAVE TO GET SIGNIFICANTLY MORE BLUNT

BUT WE'RE REALLY MORE OF A KNIFE AND SWORD GROUP

THAT WE ARE, THIEF BUT THAT WON'T BE A PROBLEM. WE'RE FIGHTING A VAMPIRE, SO WE NEED TO DRIVE A STAKE THROUGH ITS HEART

WE NEED ONLY CALL UPON THE MIGHTIEST STAKE IN ALL THE LAND!

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PLEASE TELL ME YOU AREN'T THINKING WHAT I ALREADY *KNOW* YOU'RE THINKING

TOO LATE, THIEF WHEN YOUR MIND IS AS PRODIGIOUS AS MINE, YOU GET IDEAS LIKE *THIS* ALMOST BEFORE YOU KNOW IT

I GUESS THE TRICK IS BEING SMART ENOUGH *NOT* TO ACT ON THOSE IDEAS THEN

NO TIME FOR THAT, I'M TOO BUSY ACTIN' ON MY GREAT IDEA!

FLYING THROUGH SPACE!

HAVING ADVENTURES!

ARMOIRE, ARMOIRE! OF INVINCIBILITAAAY!

I WAS THINKING WE COULD START USING THEMESONGS FROM NOW ON TO LIVEN THINGS UP

JUST... *WHY?*

SLAM!

WE ARE NOT GOING TO HAVE THEME SONGS, RM.

LET ME DO YOURS BEFORE YOU DECIDE.

SLINGS AND ARROWS, SLINGS AND ARROWS

HE'LL GET YOUR WALLET, LOOK OUT FOR HIM, IT'S *THIEF!* YEAH!

IT'S THIEF!

IT'S *THIIIEEF!*

G'HEY!

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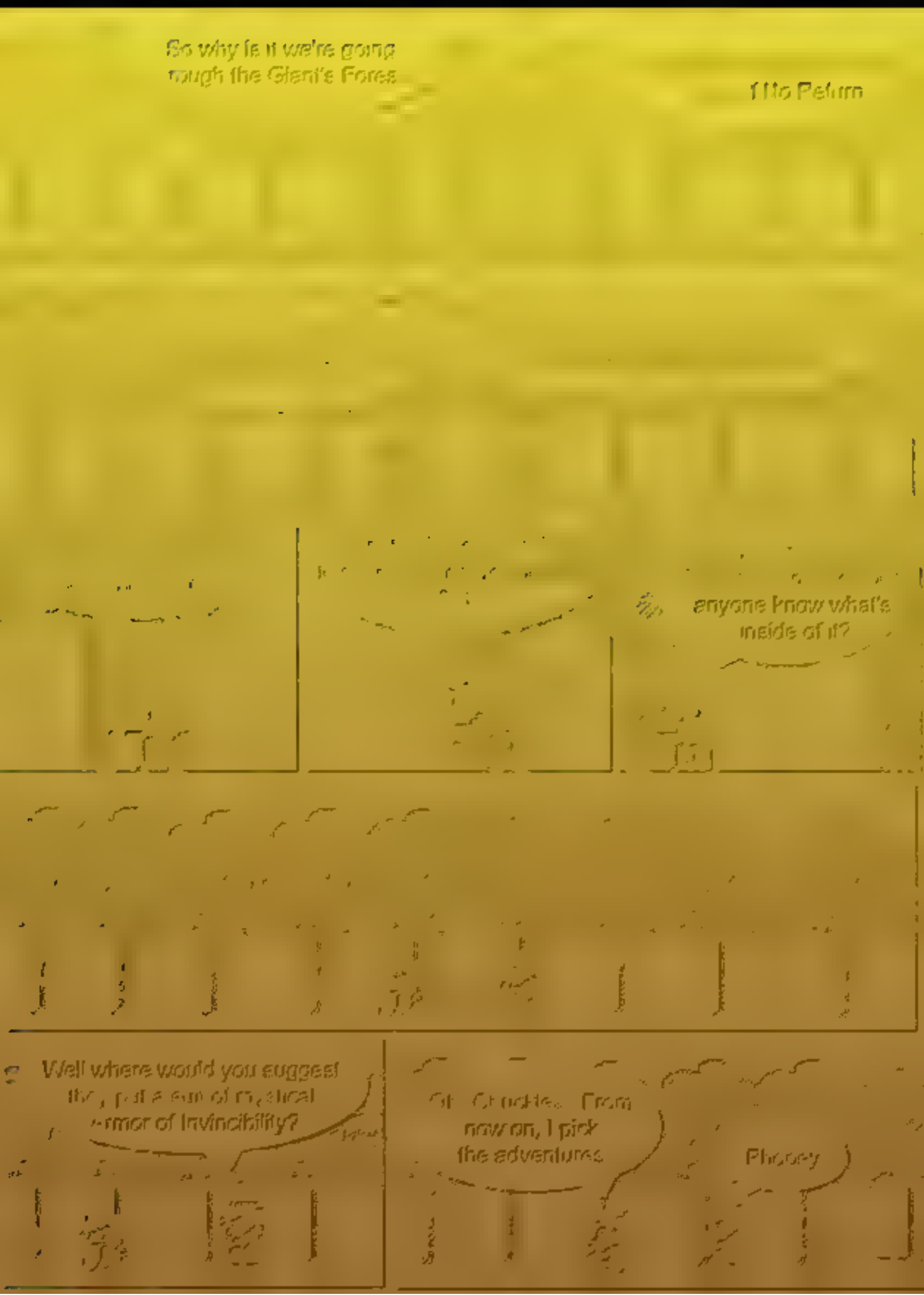
8-BIT THEATER #1 GOLD FOIL EMBOSSED COLLECTION EDITION!

OR

A LAME EXCUSE FOR A FILLER BECAUSE BRIAN IS IN BOSTON...



AND DROP!

SQUISH

DID WE GET HIM?

OH, SWEET LADY AGONY, YOU ARE THE ONLY REMINDER THAT UNLIFE STILL FLOWS THROUGH MY VEINS!

OKAY, KILLING DOES NOT TAKE THIS LONG

WHAT'S THE HOLD UP?

WE ARE HAVING SOME TROUBLE HITTING HIS HEART

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE, WE'VE NAILED MOST OF HIS OTHER ORGANS

IT'S TAKEN THE FIGHT OUT OF HIM.

MY DARK PANCREAS OF THE DAMNED SHALT NEVER BE THE SAME!

YEAH, AND HIS LIVER OF DECAY IS COMPLETELY SHOT

C'MON, LET'S TRY IT AGAIN

HEAVE!

CRUNCH!

I THINK THAT WAS HIS NECK

LOOK AT IT THIS WAY.

THE MORE PUNCTURE HOLES THERE ARE, THE LESS SURFACE AREA THERE IS.

SO IT BECOMES INCREASINGLY LIKELY THAT WE'LL GET IT RIGHT

EVENTUALLY

ODE TO MINE SUFFERING, BY VILBERT

MY LIFE IS TORMENT.

WHO ARE YOU [illegible]STANDER?

MY LIFE I[illegible]

WHAT ARE [illegible] JOCK?

MY LIFE I[illegible]

FASTER, FASTER, FASTER, FASTER!

WHAT IS A SOUL, IF NOT A BOWL OF PAIN?

A BOWL OF PAIN

A BOWL OF PAIN

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SPLURT

WAS THAT IT?

WELL, HE STOPPED RECITING AWFUL POETRY, SO YOU EITHER PIERCED HIS SOTHICULAR MEMBRANE OR HIS HEART

EITHER ONE IS GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME.

WHY IS MY SON LYING IN THE FRONT YARD WITH WHAT APPEAR TO BE TWO DOZEN FURNITURE INDUCED STAB WOUNDS?

DAMMIT, THIEF

MEANWHILE

I'M BORED

WHEN ARE THEY COMING BACK?

SOON

YOU KEEP SAYING THAT

WELL, YOU KEEP ASKING THAT

LET'S PLAY A GAME TO PASS THE TIME

I'D LOVE TO, BUT YOU LOST ALL OUR GAME PIECES

[illegible]

HYPER-DIMENSIONAL, I SAY!

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I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU GUYS ARE WORRIED ABOUT.

HE LOOKS LIKE EASY PREY. HE'S PROBABLY GOT LOW EVASION AND DEFENSE

I MEAN, HE'S A SACK OF BONES.

EVEN SKELETOR, WHO IS EASILY *MORE* INCOMPETENT THAN COBRA COMMANDER, HAS A FLESHY EXTERIOR

HOW DIFFICULT COULD HE BE?

YOU MOCK THE LICH KING?

YOU'LL NEVER DEFEAT HE-MAN WITHOUT *SKIN* SKULL!

ALL THAT IS LIVING TURNS TO ASH IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LICH

I AM THE BEAUTY OF DECAY, THE PERFECTION OF DEATH

ALL THAT IS BORN LIVES ONLY TO DIE!

AND IN DEATH SHALL YOU SERVE A NEW MASTER *LICH!*

SO FACE ME, OH WARRIORS, AND KNOW THE HORROR OF PERFEC TION!

YES, YES, THE LORD OF THE DEAD SHALL SURELY INHERIT THE GREATEST KINGDOM GIVEN ENOUGH TIME

NOW HUSH, THE ADULTS ARE TALKING

WHAT

IMPRESSIONS?

I'M SURE ALL OF THAT WAS A SAD DISPLAY OF BRAVADO

BUT I COULD EASILY DESTROY HIM IN ANY NUMBER OF WAYS.

WELL, LET'S GET CRACKIN' THEN.

ENOUGH TALK

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MAYBE WE SHOULD'VE FOLLOWED THEM.

I KNOW YOU BELIEVE IN THE DESTINY OF THE LIGHT WARRIORS AND ALL THAT JAZZ, BUT IT COULDN'T HURT TO NUDGE FATE IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

THEY WERE USING US AS A CRUTCH

THEY NEVER WOULD'VE BEEN READY FOR THE TRIALS THAT LIE AHEAD IF WE CONTINUE TO LET THEM RELY ON US.

IT IS THEIR TIME

WHAT IF, Y'KNOW, THEY DON'T MAKE IT?

THEN THEY NEVER WERE THE LIGHT WARRIORS AND WE'RE BETTER OFF NOT WASTING ANY MORE TIME ON THEM.

THERE IS MORE AT STAKE THAN THE LIVES OF FOUR ADVENTURERS.

YOU JUST FELL FOR THE OLDEST TRICK IN THE BOOK, LICH KING!

THE TRICK WHERE YOU GET THREE GULLIBLE SUCKERS TO MAKE YOU THEIR UNDISPUTED LEADER?

YOU JUST FELL FOR THE SECOND OLDEST TRICK IN THE BOOK, LICH KING!

THE TRICK WHERE YOU PUT YOUR SOUL INTO A GEM SO YOU CAN'T BE KILLED AND INSTEAD BECOME AN INVINCIBLE RULER OF THE DEAD?

YOU JUST FELL FOR THE *THIRD* OLDEST TRICK IN THE BOOK LICH!

YOU MEAN ATTACHING TWO SWORD HILTS BY A LENGTH OF CHAIN---

OKAY, THAT IS *SO* NOT IN TRICK BOOK

WHAT ARE *YOU* SMILING ABOUT?

CAN'T YOU TELL? I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO MY DEMISE AND FREEDOM.

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I TIRE OF THIS

SMACK!

THAT'S THE LAST MISTAKE YOU'LL EVER MAKE, YA STINKY PILE OF BONES!

GIVE 'IM A DOSE OF ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION, BM.

GO ON MAKE WITH THE BLAST-ING

BLACK MAGE?

GET UP AND YELL AT ME

BLACK MAGE. GET UP.

PLEASE.

DEATH IS THE NATURAL STATE OF ALL BEING.

LIFE IS THE ABERRATION IT IS FLEETING, AND FULL OF PAIN.

COME, EMBRACE THE ETERNITY IN NOTHING!

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YEEEAAARRRRRGH!

CAN YOU HELP HIM?

DAMMIT, THIEF, I'M A RED MAGE, NOT A DOCTOR!

SCRIBBLE
EDIT
CHANGE
ERA
SCRITCH
FUR

YET!

OKAY, HAS HE HAD ALL HIS SHOTS? WAS HIS MOTHER TESTED FOR FELINE LEU-KEMIA?

WHAT?!

SORRY I MULTI-CLASSED BEASTMASTER BECAUSE THEY GET MORE SKILL RANKS THAN A HEALER.

THE DRAWBACK IS THE EXTRA ONES HAVE TO APPLY TO THE ANIMAL KINGDOM.

I FIGURED BLACK MAGE IS, MORE OR LESS, MAMMALIAN, SO IT *SHOULD* WORK OUT

DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING, RM?

WHY SHOULD *THAT* STOP ME?

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FIGHTER, YOU ARE EASILY MY MOST ACCOMPLISHED STUDENT

YEAH, I'M PRETTY AWESOME.

THERE IS BUT ONE MORE LESSON FOR YOU HERE AT FIGHTER'S CAMP '86

SHOOT,

HOW MANY SCHOOLS OF ZODIAC KENSHIDO ARE THERE?

WHAT, THAT'S IT? YOU TOLD US THAT ON OUR FIRST DAY AT ORIENTATION. THERE'S TWELVE SCHOOLS.

HOW MANY, FIGHTER?

TWELVE, ONE SCHOOL FOR EACH SIGN OF THE ZODIAC, GIVEN ENOUGH TIME AND SOME HINTS, AND I COULD EVEN NAME THEM FOR YA.

YOU HAVE LEARNED NOTHING GO

BUT... I'VE GOT NOWHERE ELSE TO GO!

THERE IS NOTHING FOR YOU HERE. GO

GUESS IT'S TIME TO GIVE UP THE BLADE AND EMBRACE MY TRUE CALLING IN LIFE

SHORT ORDER COOK!

BONK

HEY, WATCH WHERE YER GOIN', JERK-FACE!

SORRY, I'M IN A BIT OF A FUNK ABOUT HAVING MY LIFE'S DREAMS SHATTERED BECAUSE I COULDN'T ANSWER SOME WEIRDO PHILOSOPHY QUESTION

YOU TOO?

THEY JUST KICKED ME OUT OF THE BLACK WIZARDRY CAMP FOR THE SAME THING.

APPARENTLY THE ANSWER TO "HOW MANY 5TH LEVEL SPELLS CAN AN EXPERIENCED WIZARD CAST?" IS ***NOT*** "MORE THAN ENOUGH TO DESTROY YOU ALL AND YOUR FAMILIES." FEH!

I SHOULD'VE KNOWN, THOUGH IN PHILOSOPHY, IT'S NEVER THE MOST OBVIOUS ANSWER

WE'RE BEST FRIENDS NOW!

WE'RE WHO ON THE WHAT NOW?

WE'LL BE BOSOM CHUMS!

WE'LL TRAVERSE THE LANDSCAPES OF GROWING UP IN THIS CRAZY WORLD

WE'LL HAVE OUR UPS AND DOWNS, BUT IN THE END, WE'LL ALWAYS BE THERE FOR EACH OTHER. IT'LL BE GREAT!

SOUNDS WONDERFUL, YEAH

TURN AROUND FOR ME?

SURE THING, BEST BUDDY!

TINK!

WE'LL OVERCOME ALL KINDS OF TRIALS LIKE BULLIES AND HOMEWORK AND GIRLS.

TINK TINK TINK TINK TINK TINK TINK TINK

AND UNREASONING SCHOOL PRINCIPALS WHO ARE THE FONT OF ALL STAGNATION IN THE KNOWN UNIVERSE

WHAT PART OF BEING STABBED DO YOU NOT UNDER-STAND?

OKAY, I'M PRETTY SURE HIS NECK ISN'T SUPPOSED TO GO THAT WAY.

WHO IS THE DOCTOR HERE?

GOOD QUESTION

FEH

AT LEAST WE CAN AGREE THAT IF ANYTHING GOES WRONG, IT WAS DUE TO **YOUR** NEGATIVISM.

CLANK!

WAIT, WHAT?!

BONES SHOULD **NOT** GO "CLANK", RM.

HE'S CLEARLY DYING OF ACUTE NEG-ATIVISM.

TAKE **THAT**, YOU UGLY BONEY GUY!

CLANK!

"CLANK"?

WOW, I'M NOT DANGEROUSLY INCOMPE-TENT!

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COULD THAT BE ?

THE EARTH ORB!

LICH MUST'VE KEPT IT ON HIM AND WHEN FIGHTER ATTACKED, HE--

EXPOSITION LATER--

ACQUISITION NOW!

SCORE! THIEF GOT IT!

GET UP, LICH

I'M NOT THROUGH HURTING YOU YET

YOU HAVE NO IDEA THE FORCES AT WORK HERE BOY

IF DEATH HIM-SELF CANNOT TAKE ME, WHAT MAKES YOU THINK YOU CAN?

I SAID GET UP!

OF COURSE

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URGH...

WHAT A HORRIBLE DREAM

THERE WAS THIS IDIOT AND THESE TWO OTHER IDIOTS.

WE KEPT RUN-NING INTO IDIOTS.

SO HORRIBLE.

WHY DO I SMELL SULFUR AND BRIMSTONE?

YOU'LL PRAY TO YOUR GOD, READ GOOD TO HAVE THEM BACK BY THE TIME WE'RE THROUGH WITH YOU.

I CAN'T SAY I'M SURPRISED BY THIS TURN OF EVENTS

WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU, BLACK MAGE. EAGERLY WAITING

YOU'VE PERPETRATED SO MUCH WRONG DOING IN YOUR SHORT TENURE ON EARTH WE'VE HAD TO DEDICATE A WHOLE NEW WING OF HELL TO VISIT ETERNAL SUFFERING UPON YOU.

YOU SAY I DID WRONG, BUT IT ALWAYS FELT SO *RIGHT* AT THE TIME.

WELL, THAT *IS* WHY YOU ARE HERE, YA KNOW

SO, YOU'RE, WHAT, THE HEAD HELL GUY?

OH YES, I DON'T USUALLY GREET NEWCOMERS ON THEIR FIRST DAY--

--WE LIKE TO SAVE THEM INTO THE IDEA OF INFINITE PAIN AND SUFFERING--

--BUT WE HAD TO MAKE AN EXCEPTION FOR YOU BLACK MAGE.

WAIT, IF I *DID* EVIL, AND YOU GUYS HERE *ARE* EVIL, THEN SHOULDN'T YOU BE SHOWERING ME WITH REWARDS AND CONCUBINES, ETC.?

THIS IS HELL WE'RE BIG ON IRONY HERE.

THEN I'M SURE YOU'LL APPRECIATE WHAT IS GOING TO OCCUR.

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NURGLE DEMON PRINCE MINIATURE PAINTED BY JASON RICHARDS WWW.MINIATURESPACE.NET

IT APPEARS THAT OUR USUAL STRATEGIES AREN'T WORKING, RM.

YOU MEAN BUNGLE AROUND AND LET WHITE MAGE SORT IT OUT?

THAT'S NOT HOW I'D CHARACTERIZE IT, BUT ONLY BECAUSE OF MY TREMENDOUS EGO.

NO MATTER! A NEW STRATEGY IS FORMING IN MY COLOSSAL BRAIN.

FIRST, FIGHTER COULD--

I SHOULD'VE BEEN THERE, I SHOULD'VE STOPPED IT, I'M THE MEATSHIELD, IT'S A SIMPLE JOB

--ROCK BACK AND FORTH AND MUMBLE TO HIMSELF USELESSLY

OKAY, NEW PLAN HOW FAST CAN YOU RUN?

YOU CANNOT HIDE FOREVER

OH, YOU'D BE SURPRISED WHAT COWARDICE HAS DONE FOR US SO FAR.

AT LEAST WE GOT THE EARTH ORB FROM YOU!

PERHAPS WE SHOULDN'T REMIND HIM OF THINGS LIKE THAT?

AH YES, FIGURING OUT THAT THE GEM I'D SEALED MY SOUL INTO WAS THE VERY EARTH ORB ITSELF, THAT WAS AN IMPRESSIVE PIECE OF DETECTIVE WORK

WAIT, WE FIGURED THAT OUT?

NO ONE CAN SAY WE DON'T KNOW IT **NOW**. THAT'S CLOSE ENOUGH, REALLY

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YOUR BRAVADO IN THE FACE OF ETERNAL AGONY IS A SAD DISPLAY.

IT'S NOT BRAVADO IT'S THINKING AHEAD

I'M DEAD, SO THIS IS SOME KIND OF EGOSCOPIC PROJECTION OF MY SELF?

CORRECT. BUT I HARDLY SEE WHAT—

SO WITHOUT ANY FLESHY MEATS TO SLOW ME DOWN, HOW LONG DO YOU **REALLY** THINK IT'LL TAKE FOR ME TO USURP YOUR ENTIRE KINGDOM?

I HAVE THE ENTIRE LEGIONS OF HELL AT MY COMMAND

ENJOY IT WHILE YOU CAN, SKIPPY

MEANWHILE, ON LESS THEORETICAL PLANES OF EXISTENCE..

ALL WE HAVE TO DO TO DEFEAT LICH IS DESTROY THE EARTH ORB

WHICH WE CAN'T DO WITHOUT DESTROYING THE ENTIRE WORLD

WHO DESIGNED THIS CAMPAIGN SETTING?

WHY WOULD YOU INCLUDE FOUR POINTS OF SUCH CATASTROPHIC WEAKNESS THAT TAMPERING WITH ANY OF THEM RESULTS IN THE DESTRUCTION OF THE GLOBAL ECOSYSTEM?

IT MAKES **NO** SENSE!

THERE'S GOT TO BE A WAY—

A KIND AND LOVING CREATOR WOULD NEVER DO THIS, AND A CRUEL ONE WOULD SIMPLY HAVE MADE THE AIR OUT OF ACID

AND IT WOULDN'T HAVE EVOLVED ON ITS OWN, AS THERE'S NO ADVANTAGE TO LIVING IN A WORLD POISED ON THE BRINK OF ANNIHILATION!

IF I STILL HAD TO CONSUME FOOD, I WOULD FEAST UPON YOUR ENTRAILS, TONIGHT

WE NEED TO **FOCUS**, RM.

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WE'RE GOING ABOUT THIS LICH-SOUL-GEM-THING TOO LOGICALLY
IF EVER OUR PLOTS HAVE HAD A SHORTCOMING, IT'S HAD TO DO WITH LOGIC.
THE PROBLEM IS NOT THE EARTH ORB ITSELF, BUT WITH LICH'S SOUL.
WHICH HAPPENS TO BE IN THE ORB
SO IF WE CAN GET IT OUT OF THE ORB .. WELL, THAT'D BE GOOD RIGHT?
AND JUST HOW DID YOU PLAN ON DOING THAT?
BY RELYING ON THE WORLD'S MOST ACCOMPLISHED CRIMINAL MIND!
WHAT COULD KING STEVE DO FOR US?
AH, YOU MEANT ME, DIDN'T YOU.
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NUKLEARPOWER.COM AND 8 BIT THEATER HAVE BEEN GROWING IN POPULARITY AT AN ALARMING RATE PRETTY MUCH FROM DAY ONE.

IT WAS INEVITABLE THAT THAT WE'D START GETTING THE ATTENTION OF CORPORATE AND MAINSTREAM AMERICA.

THE RUMORS WERE TRUE. THERE ***WAS*** A MOVIE DEAL. I WROTE THE SCRIPT, ALONG WITH INPUT FROM SOSA AND MIKE, FOR A TALE LOOSELY BASED ON THE EVENTS AND CHARACTERS OF 8BT

WE HAD A GROUP OF HEROES THE ***WARRIORS OF LIGHT***, WHO WERE TO FACE THE DREADED ***WARRIORS OF DARKNESS*** TO DECIDE THE FATE OF THE WORLD

THERE WAS LOVE. THERE WAS ADVENTURE, THERE WAS A NONSTOP ONSLAUGHT OF COMEDY, AND A MUSICAL NUMBER (SOSA'S IDEA)

BUT, HOLLYWOOD, SHE'S A CRUEL MISTRESS. WE HANDED HER A GOLDEN SCRIPT AND SHE SHOVED IT THROUGH THE COMMITTEE MACHINE

AFTER MONTHS OF COMPROMISES AND RE-WRITES BY THE STUDIO, FILMING BEGAN.

ONLY ONE SCENE WAS COMPLETED BEFORE MY LAWYER WAS ABLE TO EXPLOIT A LOOPHOLE IN THE CONTRACT THAT LET ME SHUT DOWN PRODUCTION INDEFINITELY

HERE, NOW, IS THAT SCENE...

THE PASSION OF THE LICH

(ABOVE): "THE ORANGE SCENE" ESTABLISHES LICH'S THIRST FOR ORANGES, A CRUTCH THAT WOULD PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN THE CLIMAX WHICH WAS NEVER FILMED.

CALL ME CRAZY, BUT I COULDN'T STAND THE IDEA OF MY NAME BEING ATTACHED TO A MOVIE ABOUT A TIME TRAVELING UNDEAD SKELETON WHO FOUGHT CRIME

FIGHTER'S VOICE ACTOR, MEL GIBSON, ADAPTED THE SCRIPT SO THE STUDIO COULD FILM A DIFFERENT MOVIE TO HELP RECOUP THEIR LOSSES AFTER I PULLED THE PLUG

I THINK IT'S BASED ON SLUGGY FREELANCE

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8-BIT THEATER

Devon Lake 2004

THE GUEST COMIC

Tell me, why do we always walk in this same awkward shoulder to shoulder formation?

...

I think after that police lineup it just sort of became part of our routine.

Wait, do you realise what potential for versatility this discovery offers! We can walk differently now! BM, you're a genius!

Technically, [illegible]

LEGAL

Later that day...

I AM OZ! THE GREAT AND TERRIBLE! FOR WHAT REASON HAVE YOU SOUGHT ME OH VERSATILE WARRIORS?

...Hunh? I knew we shouldn't have followed that yellow brick road!

Would you rather have followed that neurotic white rabbit down its filthy hole?

Hey Oz, you're a wizard right? Do you think you could pull some of your fancy magic tricks and restore the four elemental orbs for us?

THE ELEMENTAL ORBS!? WHO CARES ABOUT THOSE GLORIFIED BOWLING BALLS? HERE IN OZ WE HAVE A GOLDEN CAP THAT SUMMONS FLYING MONKIES! REAL FLYING MONKIES!

WHAT THE HELL ARE WE DOING!? We could be brandishing the power of a pack of primates mighty enough to blot out the sun with their sheer numbers!

It's not like altruism is guiding us; we're pure evil. Our party consists of a psychotic evil magician, a thieving criminal mastermind, a demented brawler with a penchant for swords... And I'm CLEARLY a communist.

Hey, if we're quitting, does that mean I can train at my sword chucks now? Watch this!

Wait, Fighter, Noooooooooo!!

SHLOCK!!

GAME OVER...

www.aftergame.net/~devonlake

OKAY, THIS SHOULD BE SIMPLE ENOUGH. I CAN STEAL ANYTHING THAT ISN'T NAILED DOWN OR ON FIRE
I'M DEALING WITH NEITHER OF THOSE THINGS NOW. THIS IS JUST AN INCORPOREAL FORCE LOCKED INSIDE AN ARCANE ORB OF SOLID CRYSTAL BY MAGICAL FORCES BEYOND MY COMPREHENSION WHILE THE EMBODIMENT OF DEATH ITSELF LOOMS OVER MY SOON TO BE CORPSE.
SEE, IT SHOULD BE A PIECE OF CAKE.
OH, SURE IT SOUNDS EASY
IT DOES? WHEW! I WAS JUST SAYIN' THAT TO SHOW SUPPORT
I COULD'VE SWORN WE WERE COMPLETELY SCREWED
Y'KNOW, WHAT WITH EVERYTHING BEING SO UTTERLY HOPELESS, AND ALL.
I MEAN, ALL THAT STUFF YOU SAID, IT'S GOT TO BE DARN NEAR IMPOSSIBLE BUT YOU'RE THE EXPERT IN THESE MATTERS, SO IF YOU SAY IT'S EASY--
THIS WAS YOUR IDEA!
YEAH, MY THEORY IS THAT IF YOU'RE HOLDING THE EARTH ORB, THEN I CAN RUN AWAY
ER, RUN AWAY FOR TACTICAL REASONS THAT WOULD, UM, BENEFIT ALL OF US AND CERTAINLY NOT SCREW OVER THE TEAM FOR THE SAKE OF MY COWARDLY SELF-PRESERVATION INSTINCTS.
YOU'RE ACTING AWFULLY..
WAIT A SECOND!
SNATCH!
YOU CHANGED YOUR CLASS TO THIEF!
DID I? EHEH, HOWEVER DID THAT HAPPEN? I'LL JUST CHANGE THAT BACK THEN, SHALL I?
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THIS IS EASY I KNOW IT IS.

I'VE STOLEN THINGS THAT WEREN'T EVEN *THERE* THIS SOU- EXISTS, SO THAT HELPS.

JUST HAVE TO REMEMBER MY TRAIN- ING.

THE ART OF THEFT IS TRULY THE ART OF DISTRACTION. IT'S ALMOST ***TOO*** EASY TO TAKE SOMEONE'S G.I WHEN THEY'RE NOT LOOKING

OBSERVING AN EVENT HELPS TO MAKE IT HAPPEN. SOMEONE SHOULD DEVELOP A THEORY BASED ON THAT

SO WITH- OUT ANY WITNESSES WHO'S TO SAY WHAT HAPPENS?

RM, YOU NEED TO CLOSE YOUR EYES.

THIS IS A MOMENT OF TRUTH

WHY IS IT YOUR BRAND OF TRUTH INVARIABLY INVOLVES OBFUSCATION AND LIES?

BECAUSE I M THIEF

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THOUGH THE EARTH ORB IS DISPUTED AMONG THE NATIONS OF DWARF AND ELF, IT IS MY DECLARATION HERE TODAY THAT IT IS AN ITEM OF SUCH POWER AND UTILITY TO ALL THE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD.

BE THEY ELVEN OR INFERIOR..

THAT IT IS TO BE CONSIDERED A NATURAL RESOURCE ON PAR WITH THE OCEANS.

THEREFORE, IT CANNOT BE OWNED BY ANY SINGLE ENTITY, WHETHER WHOLE OR IN PART, BE THEY MORTAL, UNDEAD, OR OTHERWISE HA!

WORDS, LITTLE MAN ONLY WORDS.

SINCE THEY POSE YOU NO THREAT, PERHAPS YOU'LL INDULGE ME?

AS I FIND YOUR BLATHER AMUSING I SHALL PLEASE, GO ON.

INSERTING A SOUL INTO SUCH A RESOURCE WOULD BE CONSIDERED POLLUTION.

THE LAWS ARE VERY STRICT REGARDING POLLUTION.

LAWNINJA ATTACK!

WITH THE POWER VESTED IN ME AS THE SOVEREIGN REPRESENTATIVE OF THE NATION OF ELF LAND--

--KNOWN THROUGHOUT THE WORLD FOR ITS CONSERVATIONIST EFFORTS--

--I DEMAND THE IMMEDIATE REMOVAL OF SAID POLLUTANTS NOW!

QOIT!

WHAT'DYA KNOW? IT WORKED

HAD IT NOT?

I WOULD'VE JUST BEANED HIM IN THE HEAD WITH THE ORB, TRIPPED YOU, AND RUN FOR IT

SUCKER!

AND THE LAWNINJA?

THEY'RE NINJA. THEY'RE INHERENTLY DISPOSABLE.

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OKAY, WE'VE GOT LICH'S SOUL OUT OF THE EARTH ORB. ALL WE GOTTA DO NOW IS *KILL* THE BASTARD

INSECTS!

I REGRET NOTHING!

I CAN SEE MY LAW-OOJO FROM HERE!

WENDY, I CAN FLY!

APPARENTLY THERE IS STILL THE MATTER OF PUTTING THE SOUL BACK BE-FORE WE CAN HARM HIM.

IN OTHER WORDS, WE'VE ONLY SUCCEEDED IN MAKING THE INVINCIBLE KING OF DEATH EVEN *ANGRIER* AT US. HUH.

Y'KNOW, I REALLY HADN'T PLANNED THIS FAR AHEAD IN THE SCENARIO

I PRESUMED WE WERE GOING TO BE DEAD ABOUT FIVE MINUTES AGO.

SURE IT IS. IT COMBINES THE BIGGEST ELEMENTS OF BOTH "GIGANTIC" AND "ENORMOUS" INTO ONE WORD

IT'S THE ONLY WORD THAT ACCURATELY DEPICTS THE MAGNITUDE OF MY MIND

THAT'S WHY I M HERE WITH MY GINORMOUS BRAIN POWER AND SMARTS!

DEAR GOD, THAT'S NOT EVEN A WORD!

IN THAT IT'S MADE UP, I AGREE

BAM!

FIGHTER!

SNAP OUT OF IT!

IT'S TIME FOR THE OL' ALLEY-OOP!

THE OL' WHATTY-WHAT?

SWORD, STABBY, BAD MAN!

YAR!

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PHASE ONE COMPLETE PHASE TWO: TOSS!

SHUNK!

WELL PLAYED, BUT FUTILE

YOU HAVE REDUCED ME FROM AN IMMORTAL TO A WIZARD OF ULTIMATE POWER OVER THE TEN LEVELS OF MAGIC FOOLS

AT THIS POINT, PERHAPS IF YOU POSSESSED POWER EQUAL TO MINE, YOU WOULD HAVE A SMALL CHANCE OF DEFEATING ME

BUT YOU'RE THE SAME FRAIL FLESH-SACKS YOU WERE WHEN THIS BEGAN

SO TYPICALLY MORTAL.

YOU NEVER LOOK TO THE LONG TERM.

YOU BUILD YOUR CITIES RIGHT WHERE GLACIERS WILL COME SCREAMING THROUGH IN 200,000 YEARS

NARROW-MINDED OVERCONFIDENT WORMS. HOW DID YOU EVER EXPECT TO DEFEAT THE KING OF DEATH!

DAMN BUT YOU GOTH FREAKS LIKE TO HEAR YOURSELVES TALK

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BLACK MAGE! YOU CAME BACK FROM HEAVEN-- WHICH IS CLEARLY WHERE A HERO OF LIGHT WARRIOR-LIKE STATUS WOULD GO AFTER DEATH--TO COME BACK TO YOUR FRIENDS?

EVEN THOUGH I AM THE INCARNATION OF ALL MORTAL EVILS, I JUST DON'T HAVE THE HEART

SO WHAT WAS HELL LIKE? FIGURE I OUGHTA GET READY

OH IT'S GREAT! THEY'VE GOT SINS WE DON'T EVEN HAVE *NAMES* FOR YET!

HOW IS IT YOU'VE MANAGED TO ESCAPE?

ESCAPE? NO. SEE

MEANWHILE.

DID YOU FEEL THAT?

WHAT?

A GREAT DISTUR-BANCE IN THE ORDER. AS IF MILLIONS OF VOICES CRIED OUT TO SAY "OH SHIT"

SOMEWHERE ELSE..

STUPID LIGHT WARRIORS MUST'VE BROKEN MY CRYSTAL.

I KEEP ASKING FOR LOTTO NUMBERS AND ALL I GET IS "THE DESTROYER IS MANIFEST."

AND THEN THEY MADE ME THEIR RULER

I BET IN HEAVEN THEY LET YOU EAT COOKIES FOR BREAKFAST *EVERY* DAY!

YES YES, THAT'S WHAT THEY DO

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OKAY, NOW WHAT?

I WAS THINKIN' SINCE I'M NO LONGER BOUND BY CHAINS OF FLESH AND BONE I AM FREE TO EXERCISE MY HORRIBLE WILL UPON THE FABRICS THAT BIND THE WORLD

Y'KNOW, TECHNICALLY ALL THOSE CONTRACTS I HAD YOU SIGN...

...AND ESPECIALLY THE ONES I FORGED FOR YOU...

SORTA MEAN THAT YOU ARE STILL UNDER MY EMPLOY AND HAVE TO DO MY BIDDING. RIGHT?

ONE COULD MAKE A CASE FOR THAT TRUE THEN AGAIN I COULD SIMPLY WILL THAT MORTAL LAWS NO LONGER APPLY TO ME LIKE

THIS!

BINK!

AH. IN THAT CASE, I'LL JUST BE OVER HERE IN THE CORNER WHERE I WILL CONCENTRATE ON NOT GAINING YOUR IRE.

YOU DO THAT

IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE THE LEGIONS OF HELL ARE A LOYAL LOT DON'T YOUR FEAR A REPRISAL?

HECK NO

THEIR LOATHING OF ME IS MATCHED ONLY BY THEIR FEAR OF ME

IT'LL BE MILLENNIA BEFORE THOSE SPINELESS DOGS TRY TO USURP ME

LOATHING AND FEAR IN HELL

COWARDLY, EH?

OH NO THEY'RE QUITE VICIOUS CUNNING. AND CRUEL

BUT SPINE-ECTOMIES WERE THE BASIS OF MY RISE TO POWER. Y'SEE

YOU CAN'T REVOLT WITHOUT AN ENDOSKELETON THAT'S MY MOTTO

MEANWHILE...

SPINE TROUBLE, EH? AND I JUST HAPPEN TO BE A MASTER BONECRAFTSMAN. MUWA HA!

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YUP AFTER F-E IS LOOK'N' PRETTY SWEET

I'VE GOT ALL THE MINIONS OF HELL AT MY BECK AND CALL. AND THE POWER TO WRITE THE EDICTS OF MY WILL ALL OVER THE NOTEBOOKS OF REALITY

IF I HAD TO DEFINE "THE BEST PART" HOWEVER, IT'D HAVE TO BE THE FACT THAT ONCE I TORCH MY BODY THUS ELIMINATING ALL POTENTIAL VESSELS FOR MY SOUL THERE WILL BE NO WAY TO STOP ME

GREETINGS, OH FEARED AND HATED OVERRULER OF THE KINGDOMS OF THE DAMNED

HEY ALAN WHAT'S UP?

AND HOW ARE YOU MOVING WITHOUT A SPINE?

I HAD A WHOLE *THING* THAT REVOLVED AROUND THE SPECIFIC REMOVAL OF ALL SPINES

OUR NEW MASTER HAS A MESSAGE FOR YOU.

WELL THAT'S RATHER SILLY

I THINK I'D KNOW IF I HAD SOMETHING TO TELL MYSELF

DEATH IS BUT A DOOR-WAY, TIME IS BUT A WINDOW, I'LL BE BACK

I BET THAT'S THE LAST WE'LL SEE OF *THAT* GUY!

HOLD T I TOTALLY BANISHED LICH WHAT'S--

M'HOIVEN!

SHUNK!

WHY IS THERE A HEADACHE WHERE MY EXPANDED CONSCIOUSNESS SHOULD BE?

AND WHERE'D MY EIGHT OTHER SENSES GO?

YOUR WILL IS DONE, MY LORD LICH

WEL-COME BACK TO MORTALITY, BUDDY!

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DINNER'S ON, BOYS. I MADE PLENTY FOR...

EVERY..

ONE...

I SEE MY SON HAS BEEN BEATEN *AND* STABBED TO DEATH WITH A LARGE PIECE OF FURNITURE SHUCKS.

AND JUDGING BY THE TATTERED RAGS OVER THERE, MY HUS-BAND APPEARS TO HAVE FA...EN THROUGH A FISSURE IN THE EARTH.

IT GOES TO THE WORST PLACE IN THE WHOLE WORLD.

NO, EVEN *WORSE* THAN ALABAMA, BUT THANKS FOR ASKIN'

I'LL ALERT THE AUTHORITIES SO THEY CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT THE NASTY HEL-POTHOLE YOU BOYS MADE

WELL, THIS HORRIBLE TRAVESTY COULD ONLY BE MADE WORSE BY LETTING A DELICIOUS MEATLOAF DINNER GO TO WASTE. COME ON INSIDE

LATER..

THIS MEATLOAF IS GREAT!

AREN'T YOU GLAD YOU CAME BACK TO THE MORTAL REALM SO YOU COULD ENJOY THIS STUFF, BM?

WHEN I WAS THE HELL KING, WE'D FEAST ON THE SOULS OF GLUTTONS.

IT WAS LIKE EATING MURDER MARINATED IN SIN. IT WAS BLISS.

WELL, I LIKE TO PUT A TOUCH OF CHIL POWDER IN THE MEAT

YOU KNOW, TO GIVE IT THAT EXTRA LITTLE KICK.

THAT'S... THAT'S JUST SUPER.

SULK BROUGHT CURE ALBUMS BACK

WHAT HAVE WE HERE?

LOOK AT THOSE CURE ALBUMS.

NO EMOTIONALLY BALANCED, HEALTHY PERSON WOULD LISTEN TO THAT *THIS* IS OBVIOUSLY OUR PERP

THAT'S ENOUGH EVI-DENCE FOR ME TAKE HIM AWAY BOYS!

"BOYS, I'M THE ONLY ONE HERE. AH POOR CRAZY CHIEF."

SULK TOO PRETTY FOR JA...!

QUIET, JAIL-Y

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THAT WAS NICE OF MRS. VON VAMP-IRE.

YOU'D THINK SHE'D WANT TO KILL US AND DESTROY EVERYTHING WE'VE EVER WORKED FOR AFTER WE..

BRUTALLY MURDERED HER SON..

[illegible] HER HUSBAND TO HELL..

AND TORE UP HER DRIVEWAY.

IF THERE'S ONE THING I'VE LEARNED ABOUT WOMEN, IT'S THAT THEY DON'T LIKE ME.

WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH *ANY*-THING?!

I'M JUST LONELY IS ALL.

NOT ME I'VE GOT THE EARTH ORB TO KEEP ME WARM.

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO WITH THAT?

NOW THAT LICH ISN'T POISONING IT WITH HIS SOUL, WE'VE STOPPED THE ENCROACHING EARTH-ROT

THAT LOOKS JUST LIKE THE ONE I USED TO HAVE.

SO I AM GOING TO KEEP IT IN MY BAG OF INFINITE HOLDING.

THAT'S A NON-SEQUITOR.

NO IT DOESN'T

HM, THIS IS ODD, I CAN'T SEEM TO GET THE ORB TO FIT

BUT, THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE THOSE BAGS HAVE INFINITE CARRYING CAPACITY.

WELL, I'VE BEEN BUSY

HEY, DIDN'T WE FIND OUT A WHILE AGO THAT YOUR WHOLE PURPOSE FOR STEALING STUFF WAS TO GET CASH FOR THE MEDICINE FOR YOUR DAD'S ILLNESS WHICH WE HAVE ALREADY CURED?

YEAH, SO?

SO SHOULDN'T YOU, Y'KNOW QUIT STEALING STUFF?

NO.

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No comic for you! SUCKERS! Don't worry though. I'll cook one up Sunday afternoon. It involves the Dark Warriors. I probably shouldn't tell you this, but they've got a plan to make our heroes' lives living hell by doing the following: Garland u

A VOTE FOR LIGHT WARRIORS

IS A VOTE FOR TERRORISM!

paid for by the Dark Warriors Association for Dark Warr

YOU REALIZE THAT WE DO NOT LIVE IN A DEMO- CRACY.

YEAH.

AND - EVEN IF WE DID, LIGHT WARRIORS ARE APPOINTED BY FATE AND NOT ELECTED BY PEOPLE.

- THAT'S [illegible] - BIG, BUT IT'S A RISK I'M WILLING TO TAKE.

I'M SURE THERE ARE MORE EXPENSIVE WAYS TO FAIL, BUT I DOUBT THEY'D BE AS MONUMENTAL, HUM- ILIATING, OR PUBLIC AS THIS.

YEAH, I THINK THIS'LL GET THE WORD OUT.

IT'S A COMPLETELY INEFFECTUAL STATE- MENT THAT MAKES NO SENSE ON A VARIETY OF LEVELS IF ANY.

EVEN SO, THE MESSAGE IS CLEAR.

WHAT MESSAGE IS THAT?!

"WE DON'T LIKE THE LIGHT WARRIORS." SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

SHIKE LIKED IT.

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JOHN JOHNSON, WITH ACTION ON THE SPOT NEWS ACTION FORCE TEAM HERE, SPEAKING LIVE WITH THE LIGHT WARRIORS.

WHAT IS YOUR REACTION TO THE NEW NEGATIVE AD CAMPAIGN BY THE DARK WARRIOR PARTY?

WHAT ARE YOU... DO WE ***HAVE*** NEWS MEDIA?

IT SEEMS THE DARK WARRIORS ARE ATTEMPTING TO LINK LIGHT WARRIOR ACTIVITY TO RECENT ACTS OF TERRORISM.

I'LL FIELD THIS ONE.

JOHN JOHNSON

THOUGH OUR MEANS MAY BE QUESTIONABLE, PERHAPS DEPLORABLE, WE ARE PERPETRATING THEM AGAINST ***OTHER*** NATIONS.

AND, IN SO DOING, AREN'T WE TRULY SONS OF CORNERIA?

BOLD WORDS, CONSIDERING THE ALLEGATIONS THAT SOME THE LIGHT WARRIORS ARE ELVEN

JOHN JOHNSON

IF THAT WERE TRUE, THEN WE'D HAVE INHERENT ELVEN SUPERIORITY ON OUR SIDE AND BE THE UNOPPOSED RULERS OF YOUR BACK WATER EXCUSE FOR A NATION BY NOW

WHAT MR. MCHUMANWITZ MEANT IS THAT'S JUST DARK WARRIOR RHETORIC TO CONFUSE THE PUBLIC BY OBSCURING THE REAL ISSUES.

THE ECONOMY, UNEMPLOYMENT, RECENT TERRORIST ACTIVITIES BY DANGEROUS SPLINTER GROUPS SUCH AS OURSELVES.

THOSE ARE THE TOPICS WE SHOULD BE DISCUSSING.

AND HOW WOULD THE LIGHT WARRIORS DEAL WITH THESE PROBLEMS!?

MURDER.

I CALL IT MY "FINAL SOLUTION." BASICALLY, I'M GIVEN LICENSE TO KILL AND IT SOLVES ALL OF MY PROBLEMS.

I'D VOTE FOR 'EM.

YOU'RE NOT HELPING, BM.

I CAN'T BELIEVE THE NERVE OF THAT ANCHOR GUY

STILL, YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO KILL H.M.

HEY, I WAITED UNTIL THE CAMERAS WERE TURNED OFF

YOU ASK ME, THAT'S A *CRAP LOAD* OF CONTROL THERE

NOT IMMEDIATELY INDULGING IN MURDER ISN'T A SIGN OF SELF-CONTROL. IT'S A SIGN OF, WHAT IS IT, *SANITY*

NOW YOU'RE BEING SILLY

I JUST DON'T CARE.

I KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG.

BRAINS!

BRAINS!

LET ME HANDLE THIS.

WHAT-DO-YOU-WANT!

THIS THING DESIRES BRAINS. SPEAKING TO YOU IS A WASTE OF ITS VALUABLE TIME.

A MAN DYING OF THIRST CAN'T DRINK SAND, YA GET ME?

WE'RE IN A DESERT?

GO PLAY

SO WHAT ARE YOU? WHAT'S YOUR MOTIVATION?

I'M OBVIOUSLY OF ORC-ISH DESCENT, I WALK UP TO YOU DEMANDING BRAINS. ERGO I'M AN ORC ZOMBIE.

WEEEEE!

OH, WHAT TWISTED THREADS OF FATE MUST'VE CONSPIRED AGAINST YOUR POOR, INHUMAN, HEATHEN SOUL!

TELL US YOUR TALE OF WOE, OH FALLEN BEAST

SOME JACKASS WIZARD DID IT

AH.

CAN WE GET ON WITH THE BRAIN FEASTING? I MAY BE A ZOMBIE, BUT I *DO* HAVE A LIFE

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I'M NOT GOING TO BE SILENT ABOUT THIS ISSUE.

ORC ZOMBIE? ORC ZOMBIE. THAT'S LAZY.

YOU CAN'T COMBINE TWO UNRELATED MONSTER TYPES AND EXPECT US TO BELIEVE A THIRD, WHOLLY UNIQUE MONSTER TYPE IS THE RESULT

LOOK, I'M AN ORC. I'M UNDEAD, AND I HUNGER FOR THE BRAINS OF THE LIVING.

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT WHERE I COME FROM--

ORC LAND. INCIDENTLY--

THAT SPELLS OUT ZOMBIE

I'M SORRY, NO. I WON'T TAKE IT

IF WE ACCEPT ORC ZOMBIES, THEN WE OPEN THE GATE TO ALL KINDS OF CRAP

WHAT'S NEXT? CENTAUR DRAGONS?

HOW ABOUT DEMON FAERIES?

MAYBE BUFFALO ELVES?

HECK, WHY NOT WHALE VULTURES?

I'M AS CONFUSED BY THIS AS YOU.

I'M GOING TO MAKE A STAND FOR PLAUSIBLE MONSTERS EVERYWHERE. WHO'S WITH ME?

I'VE BEEN STUDYING MONSTER BIOLOGY IN MY SPARE TIME, AND I HAVE TO SAY IT'S HIGHLY UNLIKELY **ANY** OF THEM COULD ACTUALLY EXIST

OKAY REMEMBER THAT PART WHERE YOU WEREN'T TALKING? LET'S DO THAT AGAIN.

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SNEAK ATTACK!

SERIOUSLY, GUYS. I'VE GOT APPOINTMENTS AND THIS IS TAX SEASON. AM I GOING TO FEAST ON YOUR BRAINS OR DO I HAVE TO KILL YOU FIRST?

SORRY, MR. ORC ZOMBIE WE'RE JUST TALKING TO SET YOU UP FOR THE—

YEAH, ABOUT THAT. I'M UNDEAD, SO I DON'T HAVE PARTS THAT CAN BE ANYTHING LIKE "VITAL", SO THAT DIDN'T WORK *AT ALL*

FINE PLAN B IT IS THEN.

WE *HAVE* PLAN B?

AH. THAT'S GREAT

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I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU WANT TO DI- VULGE YOUR WEAKNESS.

NO, THAT WON'T BE HAPPENING. BESIDES, I KNOW *YOUR* WEAK- NESS.

OH?

YOU'RE A BLEEDER.

WOULD YOU BELIEVE THAT'S ONLY A RUMOR?

MEANWHILE, ELSEWHERE IN THE DWARFY MOUNTAIN RANGE.

I THINK WE'RE MISSING SOME- ONE

THE ESCAPE SPELL PROBABLY OVER- LOADED

BUT IT WAS A GROUP TELEPORT

THE DYNAMICS OF THE SPELL DON'T CARE IF THERE'S THREE OR THREE *HUNDRED* SO LONG AS WE ARE, CONCEPTUALLY, A GROUP.

WELL, I'M SURE WE'RE BETTER OFF I MEAN, THAT BLACK MAGE IS OKAY.

Active Members of Light Warriors: Red Mage, Fighter, Thief, ~~Black Mage~~

SECRETLY, I MEANT WE ARE BETTER OFF

YOU FORGOT TO DO YOU LITTLE THIEFY WHISPER THING SO WE COULDN'T HEAR YOU.

DID I, FIGHTER? DID I REALLY?

I WONDER WHAT THAT WAS.

YEAH, I COULD HEAR YOU.

DID YOU, FIGHTER? DID YOU REALLY?

DID YOU... I, BUT.

I THINK WE'RE MISSING SOMEONE

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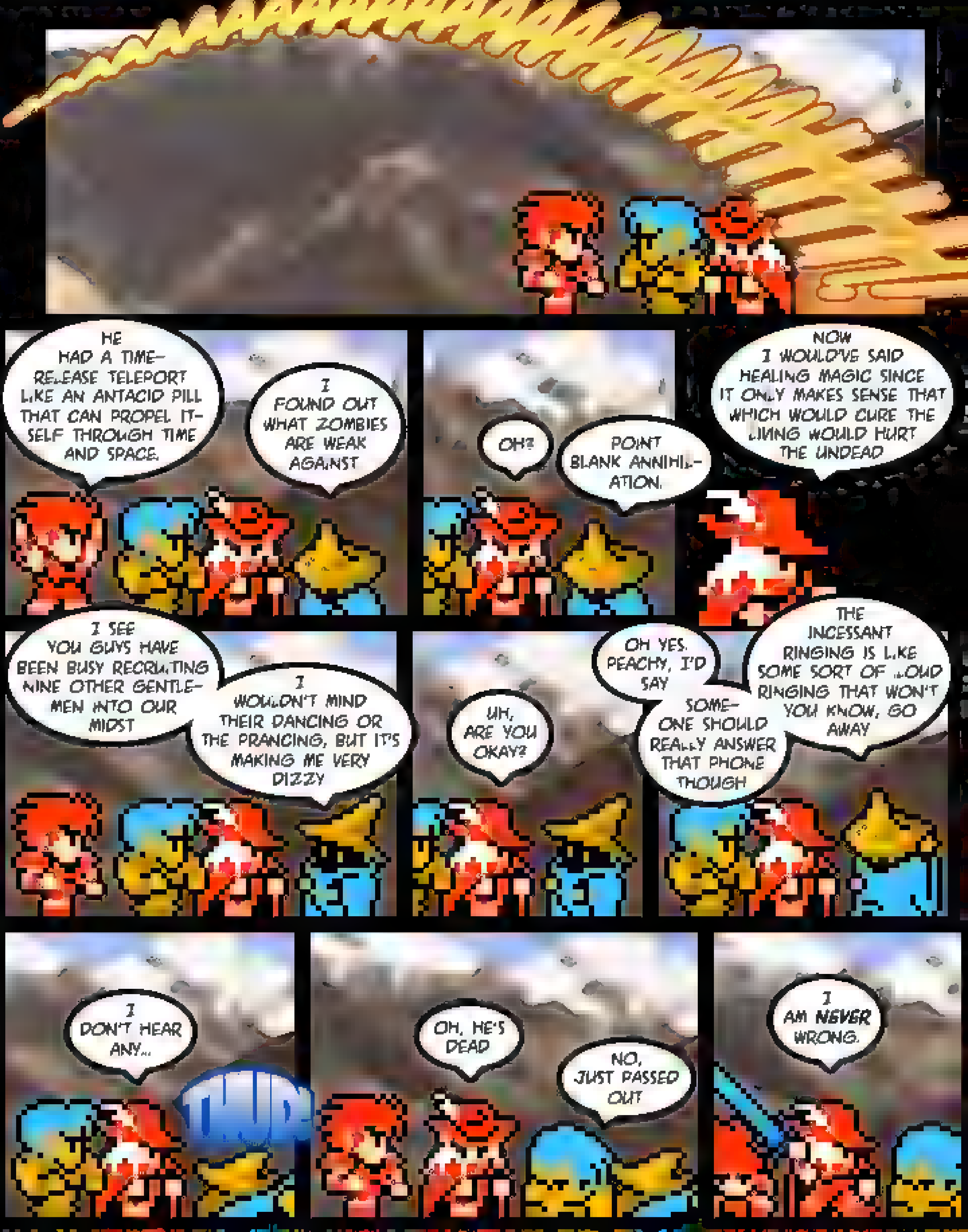

WHY DOES MY FACE FEEL LIKE FIVE MILES OF BAD ROAD?

DUNNO, THERE AREN'T ROADS OUT HERE JUST MOUNTAIN PATHS LITTERED WITH MANY SMALL, JAGGED ROCKS.

PLUS, WE'VE ONLY GONE ABOUT THREE, FOUR MILES TOPS. YOU'RE *WAY* OFF

YOU'RE DRAGGING ME TO THE NEXT TOWN TO TAKE CARE OF MY WOUNDS, AREN'T YOU?

I'M A HELPER!

I KNOW THIS WASN'T YOUR IDEA AS IT DOESN'T INVOLVE CHAINING TWO DOCTORS TOGETHER AND WIELDING THEM AT ME UNTIL I'M CURED.

RED MAGE SAID WE COULD CALL IT *PLAN B*

SO YOU'RE DOING THIS AT THE BEHEST OF...

THIEF, OF COURSE

NATURALLY

CONGRATULATIONS, YOU POINTY-EARED, MONKEY-FUGGIN', ELVEN FREAK. YOU'RE AT THE TOP OF MY DEATH LIST NOW!

YOU WAIT UNTIL WE GET TO THE END OF THE TRAIL OF MY *BLOOD* WHEN I CAN MAKE IT OFFICIAL.

OH, DON'T YOU WORRY, BLACK MAGE.

I'LL DO IT FOR YA.

NO, TOUCH NOTHING, THESE ROBES ARE BOOBY TRAPPED, YOU'LL DAMN US ALL.

LACKING AS I DO IN WRITING IMPLEMENTS OF ANY KIND, I'LL EDIT WITH MY BLADE!

DEATH LIST

1. Fighter
2. People magazine
3. apples
4. Red Mage's hat
5. Aldar
6. Hurt girl

MY LIST, MY PRECIOUS DEATH LIST YOU KNOW I'VE GOT A MEMORY LIKE A THINGY THAT LETS WATER DRAIN OUT OF IT WHILE KEEPING BACK SOLIDS OF APPRECIABLE SIZE.

I'LL HAVE TO RAZE THE EARTH TO MAKE SURE I DIDN'T SKIP ANYONE

I'M A HELPER!

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YOUR TOTAL COMES TO 34 GIL, SIR.

THAT A FACT? LET ME TELL YOU A FEW THINGS ABOUT OUR ORGANIZATION, KIDDO.

IF I ASK YOU FOR MAGICAL GEMS I CAN SHOVE INTO MY TEMPLES SO I CAN FINALLY UTILIZE MY LATENT PSIONIC POWERS, THEN BY GOLLY, YOU'RE GOING TO **GIVE** ME THE GEMS AND PERFORM THE OPERATION YOURSELF!

FOR THE LAST TIME, THAT'S COSTUME JEWELRY

THERE'S NOTHING MAGICAL ABOUT IT OTHER THAN, PERHAPS, HOW SPECIAL IT MAKES A LITTLE GIRL FEEL WHEN SHE WEARS IT AND DAYDREAMS ABOUT BEING RICH AND BEJEWELED AND BEDAZZLING.

DAMMIT, MAN. WHAT DO YOU THINK I'M AFTER!

SO THESE INCREDIBLY HIGH LEVEL SPELLS YOU'RE SELLING FOR **SLIGHTLY** MORE THAN THE COST OF THE PAPER THEY'RE WRITTEN ON, THEY'RE LEGIT?

OH YES, MORDEKAINEN'S SPELL OF LEGIT HANDS, SIX GIL.

AKBAR'S SHOP O' MAGIC

NOT ONE SINGLE FRAUDULENT ITEM

THAT'S NOT A SPELL AT...

LEGIT HANDS, YOU SAY?

THAT'S **BOUND** TO BE A MASSAGE TECHNIQUE ENHANCER, WHITE MAGE WON'T BE ABLE TO RESIST GIMME THREE!

YEAH, HOLD ON.

SCRIBBLE WRITE

YOU WOULDN'T HAPPEN TO BE AFFILIATED WITH THOSE **OTHER** AKBAR RIP-OFF STORES, WOULD YOU?

I CAN LEGALLY ANSWER BY SAYING I KNOW **OF** THEM.

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THE MELMOND INN

WE'VE STOCKED UP ON ENOUGH SUPPLIES TO FEED AN ARMY. THAT OUGHTA HOLD US A WHILE.

WELL, NOW WHAT DO WE DO, HM?

I HAVE USED THIS GROUP TO FULFILL MY OBLIGATIONS, AGAIN, SO I SEE NO FURTHER USE FOR YOU NON-ELVES.

NO FURTHER USE?

ARE YOU *MAD*? DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO SOLO AT THIS LEVEL?

WHAT APPEARS TO BE AN EVEN MATCH COULD MORE ACCURATELY BE DESCRIBED AS *DOOM*.

IF IT MEANS THAT MUCH TO YOU, THEN THE GROUP MAY ESCORT ME BACK TO ELF LAND

I'M RIDING THIS EXPERIENCE TRAIN UNTIL THEY RUN OUT OF RAIL.

OH, SURE, THAT WAS THE OLD BLACK MAGE.

THE NEW *BACK FROM HELL WITH INFINITE POWER, OH WAIT, JUST KIDDING, YOU'RE MORTAL AGAIN* BLACK MAGE WON'T REST UNTIL YOU'VE EACH SUFFERED IN WAYS THEY HAVE NOT YET HAD NEED TO INVENT WORDS TO DESCRIBE.

WHAT WE REALLY NEED IS SOME SORT OF *QUEST* TO KEEP US TOGETHER.

I THOUGHT YOU HATED US AND WOULD RELISH THE OPPORTUNITY TO RID US FROM YOUR LIFE.

AND WHERE BLACK MAGE GOES, FIGHTER FOLLOWS. SO WE'RE STILL A TEAM! AND WHERE IS FIGHTER, ANYWAY?

CAN YOU GUESS THE OTHER THREE HUNDRED SIXTY-TWO THINGS I LIKE ABOUT SWORDS?

WHAT DO YOU WANT? THIS ISN'T EVEN THE WEAPON SHOP FOR THE LOVE OF GOD *LEAVE*!

WHEREVER HE IS, HE'S NOT BEING *MY* PROBLEM.

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GO TO SARDA THE SAGE!

~~THE LIVES OF ALLHUMA'~~

MILLIONS OF GIL AND UNTOLD POWER WILL BE YOURS.

WELL, FIGHTER DOES NOT IMMEDIATELY JUMP INTO MY FIELD OF VIEW, SO I MUST CONCLUDE HE'S NOT OUT HERE.

I'M A BUSY MAGE AND CANNOT BE BOTHERED TO TURN AROUND, SO I'LL HEAD BACK INTO TOWN WALKING THIS WAY

I HATE HIM SO MUCH, BB.

HATE CAN BE AN ATTRACTIVE FORCE.

AND IT'S GOING TO ATTRACT MY HAMMER TO HIS SKULL REPEATEDLY AT GREAT VELO-CITIES.

IN THE MEAN-TIME, WE'LL JUST HAVE TO TAKE IT UP A NOTCH. C'MON.

Fightion! Megatron has stolen all the Energon!

WE KNEW THIS DAY WOULD COME

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I'VE LOOKED EVERY-WHERE FOR FIGHTER OR AT LEAST IN SEVERAL SPOTS, AND I'M **STILL** EMPTY-HANDED. I EVEN ASKED A GUY

OH GOD, MY PRECIOUS ORGANS! WHY?

EH.

THERE'S SOMEONE ELSE, GUESS I'LL ASK HIM AND THEN WRITE OFF CAPTAIN MORON FOR GOOD

PLAN BETA IS GO!

I'VE GOT A FEW QUESTIONS FOR YOU, IT WON'T TAKE MORE THAN A FEW ~~STAB~~ SECONDS.

EXCUSE ME, "STRANGER"

OH, NO PROBLEM.

MY KICKING LEG!

I DO APOLOGIZE, SIR. WHERE WERE WE?

YOU WERE ASKING ME HOW TO REACH SARDA, THE GREAT SAGE, SO YOU COULD COMPLETE YOUR QUEST, FULFILL YOUR DESTINY, AND SAVE THE WORLD.

I REALLY FIND THAT HARD TO BELIEVE.

SERIOUSLY, MY LEG!

UGH, FINE

CURE!

WAIT A SECOND, LOSER TOWNFOLK DON'T HAVE HEALING MAGIC.

ABORT!

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DO YOU BELIEVE IN FATE OR FREE WILL?

WELL, THERE'S DEFINITELY FORCES AT WORK THAT INFLUENCE THE COURSE OF OUR LIVES.

WHETHER THESE "FORCES" CAN BE ASCRIBED TO A DIVINE WILL, A MORE ESOTERIC CONCEPT SUCH AS "FATE", OR MERELY THE INEVITABLE CULMINATION OF ALL PREVIOUS EVENTS, I CAN'T SAY

I DO KNOW THIS, HOWEVER, THOUGH WE ALL END THE SAME, IT'S THE DECISIONS WE MAKE ON THE WAY THAT MAKE OUR LIVES UNIQUE.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

OH, I BELIEVE IN A FREE MARKET

HOW'S THAT WORK?

VERY WELL WHEN YOU GET TO MAKE THE RULES.

IT'S NOT LIKE YOU TO ASK ABOUT THIS SORT OF THING.

OH, EVERYWHERE I WENT THIS AFTERNOON, I KEPT GETTING HINTS AND SIGNS THAT WE SHOULD GO SEE SOMETHING OR A SOMEONE CALLED SARDA.

GO TO SARDA!

YOU'VE GOT A FEVER AND THE ONLY THING THAT CAN CURE IT IS MORE SARDA!

SARDA

PROBABLY A COINCIDENCE. BEST TO JUST IGNORE IT

ARGH.

THAT'S IT, *FINAL* PLAN.

YOU AGAIN? WHEN I STAB YOU, YOU *STAY* STABBED, PAL

?

HEY, YOU GUYS SHOULD GO SEE SARDA. HE LIVES NORTH OF HERE.

ANY PLACE IS AS GOOD AS ANY OTHER

HOW CAN YOU DO THIS TO PEOPLE?

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C'MON, WE'VE GOT TO GO SEE BARDA, HE LIVES TO THE SOUTH OR SOMETHING I THINK.

SARDA AND THE NORTH!

LIKE I SAID

ARGH!

IT'S A SHAME WE NEVER FOUND FIGHTER.

HE WON'T BE MISSED

BUT WE DID FIND FIGHTER.

HE WAS BATTLING THESE GIANT ***THINGS***, THOUGH I KNOW NOT WHAT THEY WERE, AS THEY WERE IN DISGUISE

CALL ME SPIKE FIGHT-WICKY

PLEASE, I'VE LOST SO MUCH, DON'T TAKE THIS AWAY FROM ME. NOT YET WE NEVER FOUND FIGHTER, THIEF

I'M RIGHT HERE.

LOST TO THE AGES.

AND WHAT AN ADVENTURE I HAD!

VERSIONS OF MY NEW FRIENDS KEPT APPEARING AND MERGING BEFORE MY VERY EYES.

THEY COULD EVEN SWAP HEADS, WHICH WERE, THEMSELVES, INDEPENDENTLY SENTIENT AS WELL.

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL NIGHTMARE OF THE SURREAL.

OH, THEMS M'BRAIN-MEATS.

NEVER FOUND FIGHTER

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ELSEWHERE ..

YOU'VE MADE TREMENDOUS PROGRESS LATELY, GARLAND

THANK YOU, DOCTOR.

YOUR CO-WORKERS, DO YOU FEEL THEY ARE NOW GIVING YOU THE RESPECT YOU DESERVE?

OH, YES.

EVER SINCE I SPEAR-HEADED THIS NEGATIVE AD CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE LIGHT WARRIORS, THEY'VE SEEN WHAT A CAPABLE LEADER CAN BE

HE'S NOT QUITE AS STUPID AS I THOUGHT.

YAR!

AND THAT YOUR "DIFFICULTIES" WERE DUE TO PROBLEMS AT HOME.

YES.

PROBLEMS WHICH HAVE BEEN SOLVED.

GARLAND

LET'S GO THROUGH OUR AFFIRM-ATIONS.

YES, DOCTOR. PROBLEMS WHICH HAVE BEEN SOLVED.

YOU HAVE TO BE HONEST WITH ME IF THESE SESSIONS ARE GOING TO BE OF ANY USE TO YOU

I KNOW, DOCTOR.

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS FOREST IMPS.

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS FOREST IMPS.

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS FOREST IMPS.

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS FOREST IMPS.

Dr. Impowitz

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OH, WHAT'RE YOU WORRIED ABOUT? HE'LL BE JUST FINE

I DUNNO, BM. I'VE GOT A HEADACHE FROM THE STABBING.

AND THAT'S PERFECTLY NORMAL FOR HAVING A 10 INCH BLADE LODGED IN YOUR SKULL.

IN THAT CASE, LET'S MOVE OUT!

HOLD UP, HOLD

WE CAN'T GO INTO BATTLE LIKE THIS. FIGHTER NEEDS TO BE HEALED

BUT WE DARE NOT HEAL HIM WITHOUT REMOVING THE BLADE.

BUT WE DARE NOT REMOVE THE BLADE.

AND WHY IS THAT AGAIN?

CHECK IT.

WHEN CAPTAIN AMERICA THROWS HIS MIGHTY SHIELD, ALL THOSE WHO CHOSE TO OPPOSE HIS SHIELD MUST YIELD!

TWANG!

THAT'S ENOUGH.

TWANG!

THUD

I SEE YOUR POINT

WE'D BE *FOOLS* TO THROW THAT AWAY

WE COULD SELL TICKETS.

I THINK WHAT BLACK MAGE WAS DEMONSTRATING IS THAT THE BLADE IS TOO CLOSE TO HIS BRAIN TO RISK REMOVING IT.

HE'LL DO THE SPIDER-MAN SONG IF YOU GO THE OTHER WAY.

REPEAT CUSTOMERS!

IF ONLY WHITE MAGE WAS HERE!

WHERE'D SHE GO, ANY WAY?

THEY ARE GOING TO SEE SARDA IF IT'S THE LAST THING YOU DO!

SO HEAVY...

LIGHT WARRIORS

HANDLE WITH CARE

9906753

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MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE TEMPLE OF FIENDS

LIGHT WARRIORS CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS

I MUST ADMIT, THIS LATEST SCHEME OF YOURS IS GENIUS.

YES, I'M AN EVIL MADMAN, YOU KNOW.

YEAH, AND I'D ASK WHERE YOU PUT THE REAL GARLAND, BUT I LIKE YOU BETTER.

OH, DRIZZ'L. IT'S TRULY I, YOUR EVIL OVERLORD, AND GOOD BUDDY, GARLAND. YOU CRAZY ELF.

YOU HAVE YET TO SUPPLY ME WITH ANY SUPPORTING EVIDENCE.

THIS CURRENT WAVE OF COMPETENCE ONLY HURTS YOUR CASE.

IRON YET CARING FIST

YOU'RE MERELY WITNESS TO THE NEW, REVITALIZED GARLAND.

I'M READY TO VANQUISH MY FOES AND RULE THE WORLD WITH AN IRON, YET CARING, FIST.

AND TO THAT END I'VE FALSELY LABELED OUR HIDEOUT AS A HAVEN FOR LIGHT WARRIOR SUPPORTERS.

THOSE FEW WHO HAVE NOT BEEN SWAYED BY MY CUTTING MEDIA PLOY WILL BE DRAWN HERE TO DROWN IN OUR MOAT.

THE TRANSFORMATION IS ASTOUNDING. WHAT HAPPENED TO THE SIMPERING DOLT WHO WAS AFRAID OF IMPS?

THAT'S SILLY. THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS FOREST IMPS.

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THE NEXT DAY..

GOOD MORROW, GENTLEMEN!

WHY AREN'T YOU BRAIN DEAD YET?

WHATEVER DO YOU MEAN, OH CHERISHED COMRADE?

YOUR BRAIN WAS PIERCED WITH A SHARP STABBING IMPLEMENT I WAS GOING TO ADD TO IT TODAY SO IT WOULDN'T LOOK LIKE AN ACCIDENT

OH, YEAH, THAT WAS YESTERDAY THIS IS TODAY I SLEPT, IT'S COOL.

AND?!

AND NOW I'M BETTER.

WAIT, WHAT? NO. THIS CONVERSATION IS OVER.

RM, EXPLAIN TO ME WHAT HAPPENED TO HIS STAB WOUND ***QUICKLY*** AND IN A WAY THAT WON'T RESULT IN YOUR OWN MUTILATION

THERE IS NO DENYING THE CURATIVE POWERS OF A RESTFUL STATE

THERE ARE SOME TRADITIONS THAT ASCRIBE MYSTICAL PROPERTIES TO PROPER MEDITATIVE--

HOKEY RELIGIONS AND TAKING A NAP ARE NO MATCH FOR A KNIFE IN THE HEAD.

MY HAT..

THAT'S ENOUGH POINTLESS BANTER FOR NOW WE'VE GOT A LONG JOURNEY AHEAD OF US.

WELCOME TO CIRCLE CAVE
HOME TO THE SAGACIOUS SARDA

STRANGE THINGS ARE AFOOT AT THE CIRCLE CAVE

LIGHT WARRIORS

HANDLE WITH CARE

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HAT (BM) on stick
NO HAT!!
WHERE IS BLACK MAGES HAT?
WHERE IS MY HAT?

THE ACADEMY

GUEST STRIP: OH, I'M A DIRTY DRITY MAN.

HTTP://ULFHEDINN.NET/~JONT6/MCOMIC

WHITE MAGE, DO YOU THINK I COULD HAVE A MOMENT OF YOUR TIME?

NO. YOU DISGUST ME EVERY TIME YOU SPEAK.

BUT I-

OR ACT

IT WOULD JUST-

EVEN YOUR BREATHING HAS THIS STRANGE WHEEZING QUALITY THAT GRATES ON MY NERVES

COME ON. PLEEEEEEASE? ITS MY BIRTHDAY AND I JUST WANNA TRY AN EXPERIMENT

COULD YOU JUST BARE WITH ME FOR A FEW MINUTES?

OH ALL RIGHT

GOOD, THEN. TURN AROUND WHILE I GET READY

HOW LONG IS THIS GOING TO TAKE?

THIS BETTER NOT BE SOMETHING WEIRD

DON'T WORRY, BABY

IT WON'T GET WEIRD.

BUT THE HAT STAYS ON.

YOUR TURN!

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Next Week on 8-Bit Theater

As Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy, I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense.

Tell me. Where is the virus?!

Do your worst.

Hostilities exist.

There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory and our interests are in grave danger.

I have to go back. Thief is still in there.

YOU!

That's right Garland. I have returned to reclaim what's mine.

With the unbounded determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph

Drizz't, I have one last thing to tell you. Your father lives.

I,. I think I'm pregnant.

So help us God.

BM? Thief? BB? What have I done?

What have I done?

WAKE UP YOU GOTTA HEAR THIS!

WHITE MAGE IS THAT YOU?

NOPE GUESS AGAIN!

shing

I LIKE SWORDS

OK SO I HAD THIS DREAM WHERE I MET THIS DRAGON AND HE SAID THAT HE WOULD MAKE US SUPER STRONG AND WE ONLY HAD TO GET ONE LITTLE THING...

COULD YOU IMAGINE? WE'D BE GODS!

GODS?!

SO WHAT DO WE NEED TO GET?

GET THIS... ITS A RATS TAIL!

HEY THIEF! YOU BETTER GET UP BLACK MAGE NUKED FIGHTER AGAIN.

I KNOW what you're all thinking. And that dead body over there was SO there when I got here!
OOH! What's that sticking outta his back? A sword?
Um NO That'd be his SPINE.
DUDE! He's wearing Sprint Shoes?! He won't need that stat bonus in the afterlife, right?

The ongoing adventures of

the Light Warriors

Day 417: We're lost again. Ninja says that we should go back to Elfland, but the others disagree. Our travels have thus far been perilous...

What did I just step in?!?

I hate my life.

Back in that castle, Red Wizard took a wrong turn, and we had to face down that Hydra. White Wizard was all, like "By the Gods! We are fated to die!" What a wuss. Anyway, we beat it to within an inch of its life, and it told us its secret: a Catacomb which held magic weapons that would help us prove ourworth, and defeat Chaos. Oh, how stupid we were to believe that freaky eight-headed monster.

Wait, who is that?

That's it! I've had enough

Meanwhile

I like sw

Shut up!!!

A COMIC BY
SAMURAI WEB DESIGNER

BOB'S SHOP OF BOB

EGADS!

SWORD CHUCKS
LIQUIDATION SALE
All Sword Chucks must go!
- Free Sword Chucking Lessons
with every purchase.

COULD IT BE TRUE? I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR THIS MY WHOLE LIFE, MAYBE LONGER!

MY EXISTENCE UP UNTIL THIS POINT HAS BEEN WITHOUT MEANING! WHEN I CROSS THROUGH THAT DOOR, I WILL EMERGE A NEW MAN, A BETTER MAN!

BUT WITH GREAT SWORD-CHUCKING POWER WILL COME GREAT RESPONSIBILITY. AM I READY FOR SUCH A BURDEN?

OF COURSE I AM. I AM FIGHTER! I AM HE WHO WAS MEANT TO TAKE UP THE CHUCKS IN THE NAME OF ALL THAT IS SHINY!

THIS IS A TIME FOR ACTION! NOT CONTEMPLATION! THIS IS... IS...

BOB'S SHOP

OF BOB

I SENSE SOMETHING IS AMISS.

BY THE LOVE OF THE GODS! MY STILL BEATING HEART HAS BEEN SET AFLAME!

IN HONOR OF THE 8-BIT HIPSTA, RYAN CLEVINGER.

DOES IT NOT BOTHER ANYONE ELSE THAT WE WERE MAGICALLY TRANSPORTED TO THE CAVE OVER-NIGHT?

WE HAVE A SAYING WHERE I COME FROM.

IN YOUR BOORISH, LACKLUSTER TONGUE, IT WOULD ROUGHLY TRANSLATE...

"SHUT UP, AND GIVE ME ALL OF YOUR MONIES AND FINERIES."

SINCE I'VE ALREADY CONTRACTUALLY ENSURED THE MONIES, I REQUEST THE SHUT UP.

YEAH, THE SOONER WE GET HERE, THE SOONER WE LEAVE, THE SOONER I GET AWAY FROM FIGHTER

DON'T ROCK THE BOAT

BEHOLD, WEARY TRAVELERS, YOU CROSS THE THRESHOLD TO THE MYSTERIOUS CIRCLE CAVE!

WHAT'S SO MYSTERIOUS ABOUT IT?

WHY, IT'S CIRCLAR NATURE, MY FRIEND

THE ENTRANCE IS, AT ***BEST***, OVOIDAL. THE INTERIOR IS A TUBE WITH AN INCLINE

WHAT CIRCLE?

THAT'S THE MYSTERY, ISN'T IT

YOU'RE JUST SOME CRAZY HOMELESS CRAZY BUM IN A CAVE!

AND HE'S CRAZY, TOO!

THAT MAY BE, BUT I CAN DO ***THIS!***

MY MIND HAS BEEN BLOWN AWAY!

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

I DON' KNOW WHO'S TALK-ING!

MY PARTICLES HURT!

WHO IS THIS GUY?

I, GENTLEMEN, AM SARDA, AND THAT MAKES ME ***THE WIZARD WHO DID IT!***

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SO YOU'RE THE ONE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THE WEIRD, NONSENSICAL STUFF THAT HAPPENS IN OUR WORLD, RIGHT?

YUP!

WHY?

I'M AS OLD AS MAGIC AND HAVE ULTIMATE POWER OVER CREATION. YOU DON'T THINK I GET BORED?

YOU HAVE ALL THAT, AND THIS IS WHAT YOU DO?

AT LEAST SOME AS YET UNDISCLOSED PROFIT?

WE USED TO HAVE 36 HOUR DAYS, BUT I KEEP THEM AT 24 HOURS NOW JUST TO MAKE EVERYONE HURRY

SO YOU'RE AN OMNIPOTENT JACKASS?

WHILE I'M SURE THAT'S *ONE* WAY TO CHARACTERIZE IT, I MUST DEFEND MYSELF BY SAYING THAT FROM *MY* POINT OF VIEW, IT'S FUNNY

NOW I KNOW WHAT ADMIRATION FEELS LIKE.

I MUST LEARN FROM YOU, OH MASTER OF JERKERY

AND YOU WILL, BLACK MAGE, YOU WILL.

ALL OF YOU WILL LEARN FROM ME.

IN YOUR OWN WAYS.

YES, OF COURSE, *THEY* WILL LEARN WHAT PAIN REALLY IS, I KNOW LET'S GET TO THEIR FIRST LESSON ALREADY!

THERE CANNOT BE POWER WITHOUT SACRIFICE.

IF THE OLD RELIGIONS AND THEIR DARK GODS HAVE TAUGHT US ANYTHING, IT'S THAT

THUNK!

OVER I GO.

THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT

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SEE, BY SACRIFICE, WHAT I MEANT WAS...

OH! DON'T SAY ANOTHER WORD.

I'M SO EMBARASSED. I DIDN'T RITUALISTICALLY PREPARE THE BODY!

NO, AGAIN YOU HAVE MISUNDERSTOOD ME.

SQUICK!

WHAT'S HE DOING WITH FIGHTER'S EYE— OH GOD!

THOSE DON'T GO— BLACK MAGE, THAT'S NOT GOING TO.

EXCUSE ME, I NEED TO MAKE A FORT CHECK TO THE BATH ROOM.

LET US START OVER

AWW.

AS I WAS SAYING BEFORE.

THERE CANNOT BE POWER WITHOUT SACRIFICE.

BUT ONE MUST BE CLOSE TO THAT WHICH *IS* SACRIFICED FOR IT TO HAVE POWER

DONE. WHERE'S MY POWER?

WE'VE HIT A STUMBLING BLOCK.

YEAH, THERE'S NO MORE BODIES WITHIN CLOSE PROXIMITY

NO. BY "CLOSE" I MEANT THAT WHICH IS SACRIFICED MUST *MEAN* SOMETHING TO YOU.

RIGHT THESE HUSKS ARE *MEANS* TO AN END LET'S ROL..

I CAN TELL THIS WI... TAKE A WHILE LET ME TURN OFF TIME SO WE CAN TALK IT OUT

734 YEARS, 8 MONTHS, 2 WEEKS 5 DAYS LATER IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE..

..IKE I *SAID*, THEY ARE *MEANS* TO AN END!

LET'S TRY A DIFFERENT APPROACH.

YOU HAVE TO *CARE* ABOUT WHAT IS BEING SACRIFICED

K'AIR..?

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AN END TO GANG VIOLENCE

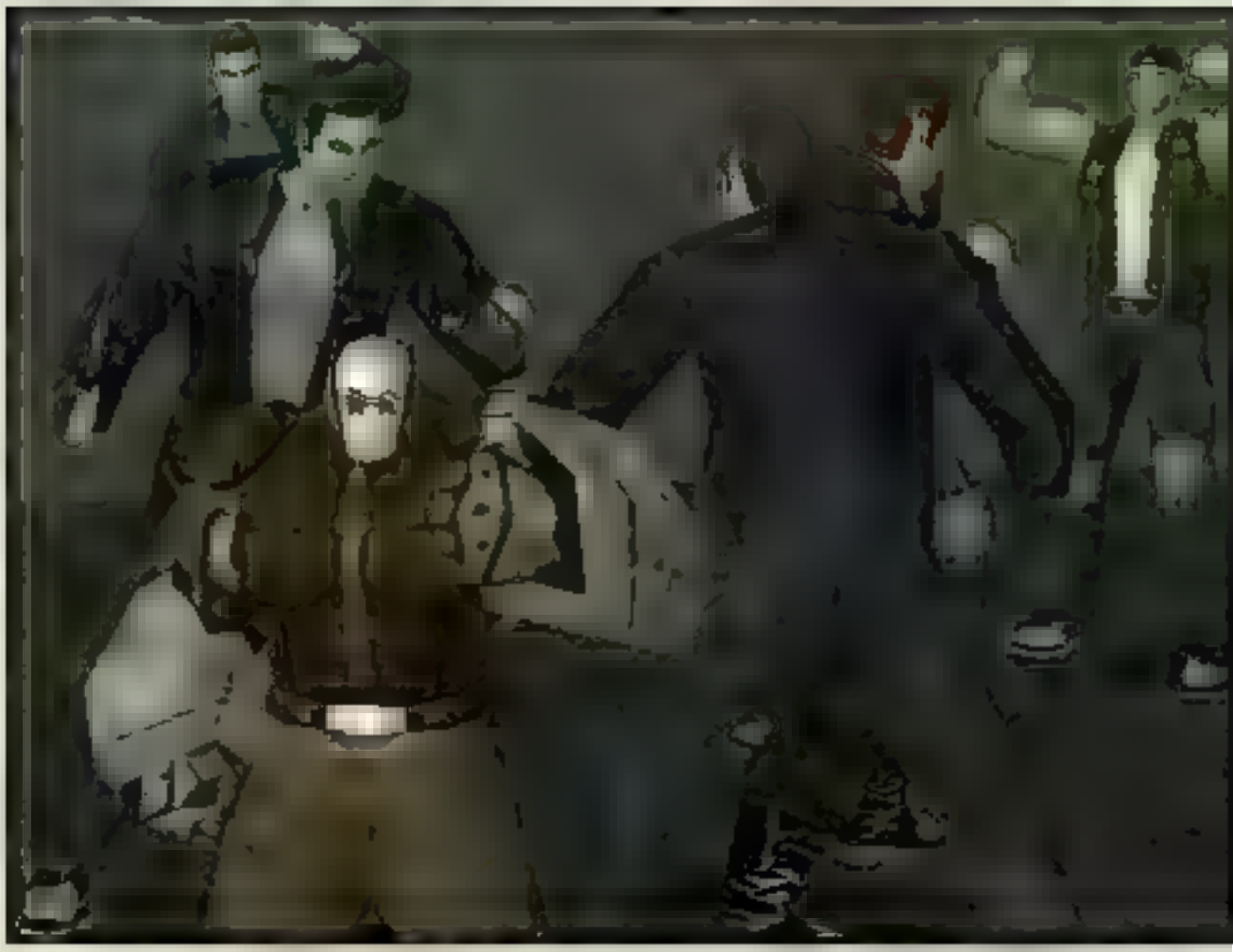
By Gil Notashark

First on the Scene

The streets of Paragon City are a little safer tonight. The brutal gang violence that has long plagued our fair city has come to an end thanks to the tireless efforts of Paragon's favorite automated son, Atomic Robo.

"All I did was open their eyes," Robo said, "The power of dance did the rest." This historic day for the citizens of Paragon City will be marked with a parade this afternoon going through the parts of the city most known for gang activity such as Hell's Antechamber, Death Alley, and Crime Central.

The Mayor's office is already drafting a new city motto to replace the old slogan "Come to Paragon City, You Might Not Be Mugged."



Atomic Robo (front, left): "All I did was open their eyes. The power of dance did the rest."

"This is only the beginning," Robo said. When robots rule, sociological factors as race will no longer be a concern. think of them as "overlords." "We'll merely fix what went balanced budget would be a priority under robot rule.

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SOME TIME LATER...

I WOULD LOVE TO MAKE A SACRIFICE, BUT I DON'T HAVE A SINGLE POINT TO SPARE

I COULD NOT PART WITH SO MUCH AS A SINGLE ITEM EITHER, AS EACH ONE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE LAST

SILENCE YOUR WORD-HOLE!

I'M *THIS* CLOSE TO FINDING A LOOPHOLE WHEREIN OTHERS MAY SACRIFICE FOR ME.

YOU JERKS NEED TO GET IN LINE.

I'VE ALREADY MADE THREE SACRIFICES, *FOUR* IF YOU COUNT MIRACULOUS RE-ANIMATION

HM, *BEING* SACRIFICED, THAT'S GOTTA COUNT FOR SOMETHING.

X2

I DEMAND A TOKEN OF POWER AS A SHOW OF GOOD FAITH BEFORE I SLAUGHTER THESE MONKEYS AGAIN

I COULD GIVE UP GUM.

THERE'S GOTTA BE AT LEAST, LIKE A THOUSAND PEOPLE IN THE WORLD

I COULD MAKE ONE HELL OF A SACRIFICE IF I WAS MOTIVATED, [illegible].

I DIDN'T AGREE TO GIVE AWAY WHATEVER POWER I POSSESED AS A SACRIFICE

THERE IS SUCH A THING AS VICTIMS' RIGHTS. I BELIEVE HAVE HAVE PRECEDENT FOR SACRIFICIAL VICTIMS' RIGHTS.

THIS ISN'T GOING TO BE ONE OF THOSE THINGS THAT COSTS EXPERIENCE, IS IT?

IT'S NOT LIKE THEY RIP MEMORIES FROM MY MIND WHEN I WALK INTO A STORE

EXCEPT FOR REGALL INC.

I HAVE ACTED RASHLY

YOU AREN'T READY, THAT MUCH IS CLEAR TO ME [illegible].

BUT I REALLY *LIKE* GUM.

SERIOUSLY, JUST A LITTLE POWER LIKE THOUGHT CONTROL OR SOMETHING.

I'M JUST TOSSING IDEAS OUT THERE.

I COULD MAKE THEM BE GOOD...

YOU KNOW WHAT YOU BOYS NEED? S'MORE QUEST-ING.

SCORE!

THAT SOUNDS SUSPICIOUSLY LIKE MORE WORK.

QUESTS BUILD CHARACTER LEVELS.

I AM SO DISILLUSIONED WITH EVIL RIGHT NOW.

IT IS BECAUSE YOU FOLLOW THE PATH OF DARKNESS THAT YOU SEE NO LIGHT.

I THOUGHT HUMAN SACRIFICE AND WORSHIPPING THE OLD GODS WAS GOING TO BE A SHORTCUT TO POWER FROM BEYOND THIS EARTHLY REALM, BUT ALL IT GOT ME WAS A CRYPTASTIC LECTURE BY AN OLD GUY WHO SMELLS LIKE *WET ASS* FROM BEING HOLED UP IN STANK CAVE FOR A THOUSAND YEARS. AND ON TOP OF THAT WE'VE GOT TO DO ANOTHER LAME QUEST? LOOK, WE ALREADY *DIDN'T* KILL SOME PRINCESS AND WE *DIDN'T* DESTROY THE WORLD, I THINK WE'RE TAPPED OUT ON QUEST TOLERANCE. YOU WANT A QUEST, HOW 'BOUT YOU QUEST UP A HIGH TOLERANCE FOR THE PAIN I'M ABOUT TO INFLICT.

WELCOME TO CIRCLE CAVE
HOME TO THE SAGACIOUS SARDA

WHERE'D HE GO?

OH, I JUST HELD EVERY-THING IN THIS PART OF THE UNIVERSE EXCEPT FOR BLACK MAGE STILL FOR A FRACTION OF A SECOND

HE WAS SHIFTED RIGHT OUT OF THE CAVE.

SINCE I LOCKED ALL MOLE-CULAR MOTION, HIS PAR-TICLES WERE OF COURSE RIPPED APART BY AIR ITSELF

BUT I MADE SURE HE SURVIVED DESPITE THE UNBEARABLE PAIN.

HUH. I THINK I'M CRAZY NOW.

WARRIORS

HANDLE WITH CARE

9906753

WOULDN'T HOLDING A PORTION OF THE UNIVERSE STILL FOR ANY AMOUNT OF TIME HAVE HORRIBLE RAMIFICATIONS?

I WOULDN'T BE THE WIZARD WHO DID IT IF I STOPPED TO THINK ABOUT CON-SEQUENCES.

MEANWHILE, ON A PLANET THAT IS HOME TO A RACE OF SUPERBEINGS DESTINED TO ONE DAY CONQUER THE UNIVERSE AND STAMP OUT ALL LIFE. SOME ASTRONOMERS WITNESS AN UNEXPCTED SUPERNOVA IN A QUIET PART OF THE NIGHT SKY

'CAUSE THIS OTHER PLANET WHERE THEY'RE ABOUT TO DISCOVER AN EQUATION TO UNITE ALL ENERGY AND LIFE INTO A SINGLE ENTITY OF PURE THOUGHT -BLISS..

..YEAH, RAMIFICATIONS.

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AND SO THE LIGHT WARRIORS, HAVING BEEN GIVEN ANOTHER QUEST BY SARDA WHOSE WISDOM, IF STATED AS A MATHEMATICAL FUNCTION, WOULD BE EQUAL TO INFINITY MINUS ONE, SET OUT UPON THE R MOST WISELY GIVEN OF QUESTS.

GO OUTSIDE. SEE YOUR FRIEND. TAKE THIS NOTE WITH YOU. IT WILL REVEAL ALL!

FIRE ORB? AM I THE ONLY ONE SEEING A PATTERN HERE?

YOU MEAN WE *ARE* COLLECTING THE LONG LOST ENGINE CORES FOR EACH OF THE VOLTRON LIONS SO WE CAN BECOME DEFENDERS OF THE UNI-VERSE?

THEY QUESTED FAR AND WIDE, ACROSS THE GREAT PLAINS AND UP THE GREAT MOUNTAINS AND ACROSS THE GREAT SEAS UNTIL, AT LAST, THEY APPROACHED THE SUMMIT OF GORGU VOLCANO, THE LAST KNOWN RESTING PLACE OF THE FABLED FIRE ORB.

WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT ABOUT THIS STUPID FIRE ORB ANY-WAY?

ACCORDING TO MY CALCULATIONS, IT'S THE CONDUIT FOR ALL THERMODYNAMIC ACTIVITY IN THE WORLD

WITHOUT IT, LIFE AS WE KNOW IT CEASES TO BE.

FOUND A WAY INSIDE!

WHAT, THAT'S IT? THE END OF ALL LIFE?

NO CONTRIVED BACKSTORY OR ANYTHING?

NO REVEALING SECRET ABOUT ONE OF THE LIGHT WARRIORS?

THE ORDER OF RED MAGIC SEEKS THE FIRE ORB AS WE BELIEVE IT IS THE KEY TO HARNESSING CELESTIAL POWER ON THE TERRESTIAL PLANE

THERE WE GO. THANK YOU.

ANY TIME.

THE HORRORS THEY FACED, THE TERRORS THEY VAN-QUISHED, IT IS TOO MUCH FOR WORDS, TOO MUCH FOR THE TELLING. KNOW ONLY, GENTLE READER, THAT THESE BE HEROES OF CONVICTION TRUE. NO OTHERS HAD EVER BREACHED THE FINAL DOMAIN OF HELLISH GORGU TO REAP THE REWARDS OF ITS MOST INNER OF SANCTUMS! AND THEN--

WHAT THE HELL?!

WHATEVER DID THE LIGHT WARRIORS SEE? IF ONLY THERE WAS MORE ROOM ON THIS PAGE TO DISPLAY IT, BUT ALAS THERE IS NOT! AND WHAT LIMITED SPACE REMAINS IS BEING EATEN ALIVE BY THESE VERY WORDS. TREACHERY IS IN THEIR FOUL BILE-PUMPING HEARTS. BECAUSE OF THEM, YOU'LL HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON. YOU CAN BE TOLD THIS MUCH, HOWEVER: NOTHING WILL EVER BE THE SAME AGAIN*! 'NUFF SAID!

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*DUE TO NATURAL ENTROPIC DECAY TECHNICALLY SPEAKING EVERYTHING IS ALWAYS DIFFERENT ALL THE TIME SO I COULD BE LYING AND THIS STILL BE TRUE! BOOP. I LOVE MY JOB.

WHAT ARE YOU RUFF-IANS DOING HERE?

HOW DID YOU GET PAST THE LAVA, THE TRAPS OF DOOM, AND THE MAGMA FILLED DOOM TRAPS? HM?!

THIS WAS UNEXPECTED

HELL, OLD MAN, HOW DID *YOU*?

HOW DID I? I LIVE HERE, DAMMIT!

IT'S A BIT OUT OF THE WAY

THAT'S THE IDEA!

IF THERE'S ONE THING I CAN'T STAND, IT'S DOOR TO DOOR SALESMEN. THEY BESEIGED MY VILLAGE LIKE A PLAGUE, THEY DID

I TRAVELED A THOUSAND MILES AWAY FROM ANYTHING LIKE A CIVILIZATION, MOVED INTO THE INNARDS OF A VIOLENT AND UNPREDICTABLE VOLCANO, SET UP DOZENS OF PIT FALLS--

--HELL, I EVEN PUT OUT A *SIGN*--

NO SOLICITING

--AND YET YOU BASTARDS *STILL* INSIST ON INTERRUPTING MY LIFE. IT'S RUDE IS WHAT IT IS.

WE DON'T WANT TO SELL ANY-THING.

WE ARE SIMPLY HERE TO COLLECT THE ORB OF FIRE. IF YOU KNOW WHERE IT IS, I SUGGEST YOU HELP US TO ATTAIN IT

OTHER-WISE, YOUR LIFE MAY BECOME IMMEDIATELY FINITE

ORB OF FIRE? NO, NO. YOU WANT GURGU VOLCANO, OVER ON CRESCENT LAKE DRIVE. THIS IS GORGU VOLCANO.

I MAY BE ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL BEINGS IN EXISTENCE, BUT I SURE HAVE AWFUL PENMANSHIP

SORRY.

WE'LL SEE OURSELVES OUT

THE EXIT IS NEXT TO ALL THE LAVA!

AND NOW, BACK TO BEING A HERMIT.

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SO WE'RE ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE PLANET BECAUSE SARDA HAS SLOPPY HANDWRITING? GREAT

I HATE WIZARDS.

WHAT?

I'M WAITING FOR YOU TO SAY "PRESENT COMPANY EXCLUDED"

ONE SIDE, BLOCKHEAD, I'VE GOT A PLAN.

IT'S SIMPLE, IT'S DIRECT, AND IT'LL TAKE CARE OF ALL OUR PROBLEMS.

LET'S HEAR IT

NO TIME FOR THAT, JUST COME WITH ME.

YOU TWO, STAY HERE

I'M STILL WAITING.

ONE HOUR LATER

I DON'T THINK HE'S GOING TO SAY IT

OH, HE'LL SAY IT

OKAY, WE SHOULD BE FAR ENOUGH NOW.

FAR ENOUGH?

I SHOULD HAVE MENTIONED THIS AT THE BEGINNING. I SOLVE MY PROBLEMS THROUGH VIOLENCE.

SEE, I THINK HE'D HAVE SAID IT BY NOW IF HE WAS GONNA SAY IT AT ALL.

DON'T YOU THINK I KNOW THAT!

I'M BOTH HONORED AND HORRIFIED THAT YOU'D INCLUDE ME LIKE THIS.

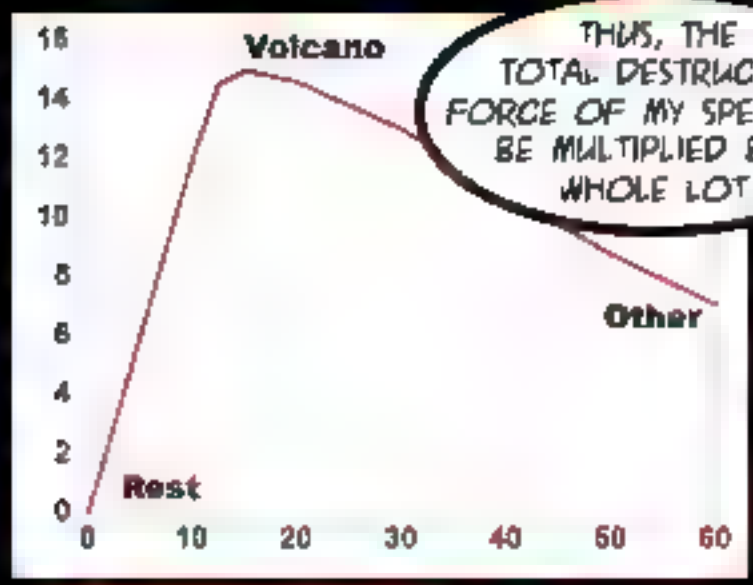
OH, I'M SORRY, YOU'RE CONFUSED, THIEF

SEE, I'M NOT AIMING FOR OUR FRIENDS.

THEIR DEATHS ARE ASSURED, OF COURSE

BECAUSE I'M GOING TO DESTROY THE VOLCANO.

THE EXPLOSION WILL COMBUST THOUSANDS OF POUNDS OF HIGHLY UNSTABLE GASES.



THUS, THE TOTAL DESTRUCTIVE FORCE OF MY SPELL WILL BE MULTIPLIED BY A WHOLE LOT

OUR FRIENDS THERE WILL BE VAPORIZED.

I'D ASSUMED SOMETHING TO THAT EFFECT WAS AT WORK

WHY'D YOU SAY I WAS CONFUSED?

YOUR TONE SEEMED TO INDICATE YOU BELIEVED YOURSELF OUTSIDE THIS PLAN.

THE SHOCKWAVE WILL EASILY SEND US INTO THE UPPER ATMOSPHERE IF REENTRY DOESN'T KILL YOU, THE SUDDEN STOP WILL

To the atmosphere with ya!

OH NOES!

I CAN CAST FEATHERFALL ON MYSELF AND DRIFT TO THE SURFACE LIKE A CLOUD MADE OF PILLOWS THAT ARE, THEMSELVES, STUFFED WITH SOFTER CLOUDS.

AND HERE I ALWAYS THOUGHT I'D BE MURDERED IN MY SLEEP

LIVE AND LEARN, THIEF LIVE AND LEARN.

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WHERE'S THAT THING GOING?

THE RESULTS OF SUCH CATASTROPHIC EVENTS ARE UP TO THE GODS. SADLY, FOR US THEY ARE VINDICTIVE AND FILLED WITH BAD IDEAS.

YOU SEE, FIGHTER, ANY TIME YOU DO ANYTHING, THERE IS A ONE IN TWENTY CHANCE THAT YOU WILL CRITICALLY FAIL.

HOW DO YOU MISS VOLCANO?

NOT THAT I'M COMPLAINING, ABOUT IT, BUT...

A PLANET IN THE SAME ORBIT ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SUN

. WHERE GIANT LIZARDS RULE.

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SO. WE'RE STILL STUCK ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE WORLD. WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

SUN MUST HAVE BEEN IN MY EYES...

I COULD TRY PLAN KILL ALL MY TEAMMATES WITH THE MEGA-EXPLOTIVE VOLCANO AGAIN TOMORROW.

WAIT, PLAN WHAT?! OH, YOU BAS-TARD!

LOOK WE ALL HATE BLACK MAGE, OKAY.

BUDS 4-EVA!

TURN RIGHT BACK AROUND, CHIEF NO HUGS FOR YOU.

WE'LL EXACT OUR TERRIBLE REVENGE AFTER WE GET OFF THIS ROCK

ALL WE NEED DO NOW IS CONSTRUCT A MEANS OF CON-VEYANCE

RED MAGE, I DEFER TO YOUR EXPERT OPINION.

THAT'S THE FIRST SENSIBLE THING ANYONE HAS EVER SAID. EVER

WE COULD MAKE A BIG WOODEN CRATE AND MAIL OURSELVES TO GURGU

From: Light Warriors
To: Gurgu Volcano

LET'S CALL THAT PLAN SHUT UP

KLONG!

OR WE COULD TAKE THE DEATH-TRAP, WHICH WAS MY BACK UP PLAN ALL ALONG.

THAT MAKES NO SENSE

YOU DIDN'T KNOW THIS WOULD BE HERE.

BUT I DIDN'T KNOW IT WOULDN'T BE,

AND IT LOOKS LIKE I WAS RIGHT

IT'S MORE PAIN-FUL THAN IT LOOKS.

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I'M OKAY THIS IS FINE.

ONLY MY LEGS ARE DESTROYED MY HIP IS MERELY CRUSHED

BUT THROUGH TREMENDOUS PERSONAL EFFORT AND A LITTLE HELP, I'M SURE I CAN BE PULLED FREE

WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

THE FACTORY, OF COURSE

I MEANT IN AN IMMEDIATE SENSE.

AH. PROBABLY FROM THE SKY. THAT'S MY GUESS.

YES. WHY DIDN'T WE THINK OF THAT?

I FIND IT INTERESTING THAT BOTH BATMAN AND LEX LUTHOR REFER TO SUPERMAN AS "THE ALIEN."

IT SHOWS THAT THEY SHARE AN INHERENT DISTRUST

COULD YOU IMAGINE? A WAYNE-LUTHOR TEAM UP? I'M SCARED, HOLD ME.

YOU JOIN THAT ORGANIZATION AND YOU'RE ON THE WINNING TEAM.

NO, IT'S COOL, GUYS.

I'LL JUST DO IT ON MY OWN THEN.

FOUR MINUTES LATER.

IT'S JUST A MATTER OF CRAWLING OVER THERE, CLIMBING UP EACH OF YOU, AND LEAVING KNIVES IN YOUR THROATS WITH MY LAST OUNCE OF STRENGTH.

THE BLOODY STUMPS I USED TO CALL LEGS ARE FREE! *FREE!*

HA! AND YOU SAID I WAS LOST

CRUNCH!

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OKAY, THIS COULD BE WORSE.

IT COULD BE MUCH BETTER, BUT IT COULD BE WORSE.

WOW, I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU ACTUALLY FOUND THE LIGHT WARRIORS, BLACK BELT

OH YE GODS, DO THEY MAKE WHITE MAGES OUT OF LEAD?

IN BLACK BELT'S DEFENSE, OR RATHER, NOT AT ALL, WE *ARE* ON THE COMPLETELY WRONG SIDE OF THE WORLD.

TYPICAL.

BUT NOW THAT WE HAVE ACCESS TO A DEATHTRAP THAT'S REMARKABLY *LIKE* AN AIRSHIP, WE CAN LEAVE!

OH, IT'S NOT A DEATHTRAP ANY MORE.

IT TURNS OUT THAT DWARVES AREN'T TOO XENOPHOBIC ONCE YOU GET TO KNOW THEM.

IT'LL TAKE *TWO WEEKS* TO GET THE PARTS?

I DON'T KNOW I'M FEELING AWFULLY FORGETFUL THESE DAYS.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I COULDN'T REMEMBER MY SPELLS?

WHY, IT MIGHT TAKE ME A COUPLE WEEKS TO RELEARN THOSE SPELLS, AND BY THEN IT'D BE TOO LATE TO SAVE YOUR VILLAGE. WHAT A TRAVESTY

WHAT AN EASILY AVOIDABLE TRAVESTY

PLUS, WE STRONG ARMED 'EM INTO HELPING US OUT

AHEM! SO. HOW'S EVERYONE DOING?

CAN'T COMPLAIN.

I COULD USE SOME LUNCH.

THINK I'VE GOT A BLISTER

DID I HEAR LUNCH?

I'M ALWAYS IN THE MOOD FOR SOME ITALIAN FOOD

WHY DOES NO ONE HELP ME?!

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WHEN I LOOK BACK AT MY LIFE, I CAN'T HELP BUT SEE AN INEVITABLE CHAIN OF EVENTS

THAT'S RIDICULOUS.

DO YOU BELIEVE THERE COULD HAVE BEEN ANY OTHER OUTCOME THAN THIS?

THAT'S NOT HOW IT WORKS. THERE IS NO GRAND STORY TO HISTORY

THINGS JUST HAPPEN IT'S THE ACT OF LOOKING BACK ON IT THAT INTERPOSES A SENSE OF NARRATIVE

AND YET HERE WE ARE, JUST AS WE WERE ALWAYS GOING TO BE DOESN'T THAT DRIVE YOU MAD?

DON'T YOU HATE YOURSELF FOR IT? FOR NEVER HAVING SEEN IT COMING UNTIL NOW?

EVERY LITTLE THING IS SO PAINFULLY OBVIOUS NOW ISN'T IT? NOW THAT IT'S TOO LATE YOU HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS. DON'T YOU?

IT'S NOT TOO LATE

IT IS FOR SOME PEOPLE

ARE YOU TRYING TO GOAD ME?

YOU KNOW IT'S GOING TO END HERE

JUST LIKE IT WAS ALWAYS GOING TO, RIGHT?

YOU'RE CATCHING ON

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ONE LAST THING DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN WE WENT TO GURGU?

YES.

WHY DID YOU DO IT LIKE THAT?

WE THOUGHT IT'D BE FUNNY

HEH THAT WAS FUNNY WASN'T IT

I'M GOING TO LOOK BACK ON THIS ONE DAY AND THINK IT'S HIL-ARIOUS.

I'LL KILL THEM ALL ANYWAY, BUT AT LEAST WE CAN LAUGH ABOUT IT.

AND SO, NOT TOO FAR FROM CRESCENT LAKE.

OH, DON'T BE SUCH A CRY BABY. I HEALED YOU, YOU'RE FINE.

WHAT ABOUT THE EMOTIONAL SCARS?

I WAS UNDER THE IMPRESSION THE SUM TOTAL OF YOUR EMOTIONAL LIFE CONSISTED ENTIRELY OF SEETHING, BLIND, UNFOCUSED CONTEMPT.

STILL WATERS RUN DEEP, WHITE MAGE. STILL WATERS RUN DEEP

WHAT? HOW DOES THAT EVEN APPLY?

WELL, I WAS HOPING SEXUALLY

HARK, WHO GOES THERE?

WHO GOES *WHERE*? WE'RE RIGHT HERE.

WHERE GOES *YOU*? YEAH. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT?

...CUNNING.

YOU HAVE PROVEN YOURSELF A WORTHY ADVERSARY THIS DAY

OKAY.

I WOULD KNOW YOUR NAME, SIR.

REALLY? THAT'S COOL.

I DON'T THINK YOU QUITE UNDERSTOOD ME.

YEAH, PROBABLY NOT

LET'S TRY THIS AGAIN.

SURE! CAN I START THIS TIME?

MYTHICAL!

YEAH, Y'KNOW WHAT? IS THERE SOMEONE ELSE AFFILIATED WITH YOUR ORGANIZATION WITH WHOM I COULD SPEAK?

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FIGHTER, WE'VE TALKED ABOUT THIS IN THE PAST

WHEN YOU HEAR WORDS THAT DON'T COME FROM OUTSIDE, THOSE ARE YOUR THOUGHTS, OKAY?

BUT THESE *DID* COME FROM OUTSIDE!

OH. IN THAT CASE, YOU'RE OUT OF YOUR GOURD

THERE IS NO ONE HERE

ISN'T THERE?

WHAT THE?!

TOLD YOU!

TADA!

SUCH AN IMPRESIVE DISPLAY IS INDICATIVE OF A TRULY ASTRONOMICAL CHARISMA SCORE.

MUST RESIST FIRST IMPRESSION!

WHAT HO, AND WELL MET, FELLOW ADVENTURERS HOW--

WHAT 'HO WHERE? YOU MEAN WHITE MAGE? SHE'LL HIT YOU FOR THAT

ER, NO.

GOOD SHE'S A HEALER, BUT SHE CARRIES A HUGE DAMN HAMMER

PLEASE, GOOD SIRS, ALLOW ME TO EXPLAIN. I AM--

UP THE CREEK WITH A KNIFE AGAINST YOUR BACK

HIM AND FRIENDS

MEANWHILE.

SEXUAL INNUENDO.

INDIGNATION.

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NO ONE AMBUSHES MY TEAM 'CEPT [redacted]

YEAH! WELL, 'CEPT THIS GUY TOO.

SHH.

ALL RIGHT, FRUITCAKE TALK!

MY FULL NAME IS...

Generic Half-Elven Dual-Class Ranger.

WHAT'S YOUR OTHER CLASS?

ALSO RANGER.

THAT'S TWICE THE MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF RANGER THE HUMAN BODY CAN HOLD!

I'M ONLY HALF HUMAN.

DEAR LORD, IT'S FOUR TIMES NOW!

HE'S MULTIPLYING!

YOU'LL HAVE TO EXCUSE RED MAGE.

HE HAS HIS GOOD DAYS AND HIS BAD.

PERHAPS MY FORGIVENESS WOULD BE EASIER TO GIVE IF NOT FOR THE KNIFE 'GAINST MY BACK.

THAT'S CERTAINLY A POSSIBILITY. WHAT'S YOUR BUSINESS HERE?

IF YOU MUST KNOW, MY COHORT AND I WERE--

COHORT?

YES, BERSERKER

...ALLERGIC TO MAGE ROBES. SO WE *HAVE* TO GIT NEKKID

YOU HURT MY BRAIN.

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HAHA
HAHA
HAHA
HAHA

OH, YOU'RE SO FUNNY, MR. HALF-ELVEN.

PLEASE, CALL ME RANGER

SWOON.

I DON'T MEAN TO COMPLAIN, BUT I THINK YOU DIDN'T ACTUALLY CAST CURE

UH-HUH, THAT'S NICE, THIEF

TELL ME, ARE THEY ALL SO HANDSOME AND CHARMING WHERE YOU COME FROM RANGER?

NOT QUITE ALL, NO.

TEE HEE!

SEE, THE STUMP IS STILL UNATTACHED AND I'M LOSING A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF BLOOD IF YOU COULD SEE YOUR WAY TO CASTING A CURATIVE SPELL, THAT'D BE GREAT

YES, OF COURSE

OF LEGENDARY SKILL **AND** BEAUTY? SURELY YOU ARE A DREAM.

DOUBLE SWOON.

I SEE NOW THAT MY **INCREDIBLE** INTELLECT MUST BECOME ALIGNED AGAINST THIS RANGER.

I'M ALREADY FORMING A PLAN OF SUCH SUBTLE **GENIUS** THAT IT WILL OBLITERATE ALL RANGER-THINKY-THOUGHTS FROM WHITE MAGE'S BRAIN.

WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY OPENING HER HEART--AND PANTS--TO ME BLACK MAGE.

YOU WILL BE MY STABBIN' DUMMY

SOUNDS INTEGRAL!

I BELIEVE THAT WAS MERELY AN ANTIDOTE SPELL, AND THEREFORE USELESS.

CRAP, PISS, KILL!

TELL ME THAT'S **NOT** A DECLARATION OF INTENT

WHITE MAGE?

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SPIT, HELL, DAMN!

WHILE I FIND OUR CONVERSATION FASCINATING, I ALSO FIND YOU TERRIFYING, UNPREDICTABLE, AND ARMED

SO I'M JUST GOING TO.

OH, I DO SAY IT NEVER GETS EASIER, DOES IT?

EH?

IS THAT A MONOCLE?!

I DON'T GET IT.

WHAT'S THAT JERK GOT THAT I AIN'T.

YOU MEAN BESIDES A GRASP OF GRAMMAR?

ME TALK GOOD!

WELL, LET'S SEE. HE KNOWS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG.

THE RESPECT OF HIS PEERS

A FACE.

MORALS.

FRIENDS.

A COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING OF THE THEORIES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF PERSONAL HYGIENE.

HEY!

I HAVE FRIENDS.

I HAVE A FRIEND.

WHAT YOU *HAVE* IS A HIGHLY DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIP BASED EXCLUSIVELY ON ABUSE.

RIGHT, A FRIEND

SEE THAT, THAT RIGHT THERE. *THAT'S* WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU.

DAMMIT, FIGHTER, WHITE MAGE DOESN'T LIKE ME BECAUSE YOU'RE A ROTTEN FRIEND.

I'M HORRIBLE!

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HOW IS IT YOU ARE WELL SPOKEN, CULTURED, *AND* A BERSERKER?

JUST BECAUSE I FLY INTO A BLIND, HOMICIDAL RAGE AT THE DROP OF A HELM DOESN'T MEAN I'M INCAPABLE OF APPRECIATING THE FINER THINGS IN LIFE.

I REFUSE TO BE DEFINED MERELY BY MY JOB. YES, BERSERKING IS ***WHAT*** I DO, BUT IT IS NOT ***WHO*** I AM.

YOU WEAR THE CLOAK OF RED MAGICS, YET DO YOU NOT ENTERTAIN THOUGHTS RELATING TO PURSUITS OTHER THAN THE ACQUISITION AND MANIPULATION OF POWER?

WELL, THE THING OF THAT IS..

AND THOUGH YOUR FRIEND IS A WIELDER OF THE DARK ARTS, SURELY THERE IS MORE TO HIS LIFE THAN CONSORTING WITH THE FORCES OF EVIL..

SILENCE YOUR PRATTLING, OR MY NEW GOD, ***MST'R IEB'AL*** WILL FEAST UPON YOUR INNARDS.

THAT'S WHAT WE CALL A "BAD EXAMPLE." SEE..

AND CLEARLY YOUR ROGUE FRIEND HAS A LIFE BEYOND CHICANERY AND VANDALISM.

HE ***IS*** ROYALTY, SO NO, NOT REALLY...

AND THIS BRAVE WARRIOR.

NO STRANGER IS HE TO THE FIELD OF BATTLE, YET HIS BLADES SING LIKE THE PEN OF A POET

HE ***DOES*** LIKE HAIKU..

AND YET YOU FIND IT STRANGE THAT THERE IS MORE TO THE DIMENSION OF MY BEING THAN RAGE AND INCOHERENT VIOLENCE?

YOUR ASSUMPTION WOUNDS US BOTH.

LIKE AN AXE TO THE HEAD?

I WOULDN'T CHARACTERIZE IT QUITE--

GREAT MORADIN'S BEARD!

I DON'T MEAN TO ALARM YOU, SIR, BUT THERE SEEMS TO BE AN AXE LODGED IN YOUR HEAD, ELF

YA DON'T SAY

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SO WE NEED A GUIDE TO SHOW US THE WAY TO CRESCENT LAKE

THEN SURELY IT WAS THE STARS THAT BROUGHT YOU TO ME, FOR I AM A RANGER, AND THE FORESTS ARE WELL KNOWN TO ME

THEN YOU'LL TAKE US?

NAY, GOOD WOMAN, THAT IS EXACTLY WHY I CANNOT TAKE YOU.

WHAT YOU AND YOUR WANDERING BAND OF CIRCUS PERFORMERS SEEK IS THE LAKE OF THE DAMNED!

TECH-
HEROES OF DESTINY.

EVERY SUMMER, A GROUP OF ILL-INFORMED YOUTHS TRAVEL TO THIS LAKE TO FROLIC AND MAKE MERRY AS IS THE WONT OF YOUTH.

BUT THE LAKE, IT'S AN EVIL FORCE, AND IT HUNGERS FOR THE BLOOD OF THE INNOCENT OFTEN IT SETTLES ON TAKING IT FROM THESE KIDS.

THERE ARE THOSE WHO SAY THAT THE LAKE ISN'T CURSED AT ALL.

THEY SAY THESE GRISLY, INHUMAN MURDERS OWE THEIR ORIGINS TO SOMETHING FAR MORE SINISTER. A ***MAN***

PERHAPS A MAN OF THE FOREST

SOME-ONE WHO KNOWS HOW TO USE THE WOODS THEMSELVES AS A WEAPON. SOME-ONE WHO COULD SEEMINGLY APPEAR AND DISAPPEAR FROM THE BRUSH AT WILL.

SOMEONE SO CHARMING HE COULDN'T POSSIBLY BE A THREAT.

SOMEONE WHO PROMISES TO SHOW THEM A SHORTCUT.

SOMEONE THEY MET ON THEIR WAY TO THE LAKE

BUT NO SHORTCUT IS TRAVERSED. NO.

HE TAKES THEM DEEPER INTO THE WOODS, WHERE SANE MEN DARE NOT TREAD

WHERE THE UNDERGROWTH WOULD OBSCURE SIGNS OF TRAVEL OR OF STRUGGLE

AND WHEN ONE YOUTH EXHAUSTED AND FRUSTRATED FROM THE ENDLESS HIKING THROUGH UNFAMILIAR, DEADLY TERRAIN SPEAKS HIS MIND ASKS "HOW MUCH FARTHER IS IT TO CRYSTAL LAKE--"

CRESCENT

EXCUSE ME?

WE WANT TO GO TO ***CRESCENT*** LAKE

OH. WELL THAT'S RIGHT OVER HERE. I KNOW A SHORTCUT THERE.

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ON THE WAY TO CRESCENT LAKE
OKAY, JERK-ASS IS BUSY TALKING UP A STORM. YOU KNOW WHAT MUST BE DONE.
YEAH?
THE PARTICULAR INFLECTION OF YOUR TONE INDICATED THAT WAS A QUERY, DID IT NOT?
YEAH?
I MIGHT CONSIDER MY DECISION TO MAKE YOUR ACCURATE PARTICIPATION A PARAMOUNT FEATURE IN MY PLAN'S SUCCESS A MISTAKE, BUT I DON'T MAKE THOSE.
THEREFORE, I AM JUSTIFIED IN PERPETRATING LEVELS OF PAIN UPON YOU AS HAVE NOT YET BEEN CONCEIVED BY MORTALS SHOULD YOU FAIL TO EXECUTE YOUR ROLE WITH PRECISION AND, DAMMIT, GRACE
YEAH?
DO NOT SCREW ME ON THIS.
JUST GET IN POSITION!

YOU SEE, TO ONE SUCH AS HE WHO IS I, THE FOREST IS VERY MUCH LIKE A LIVING SONG
EVERY ELEMENT, FROM THE MIGHTIEST TREE TO THE NOOKIEST NOOK, IS A NOTE OF THAT MELODY
ATTUNED AS I AM TO THE SONG OF THE FOREST, I CAN DETECT THE SMALLEST IMPERFECTION IN ITS GRAND, NATURAL HARMONY
THAT IS HOW I CAME ACROSS YOU FELLOWS
I HEAR THESE WOODS ARE SILLY WITH ROAMING PACKS OF KILL CRAZY BEARS.
I CERTAINLY WOULDN'T WANT TO MAKE ANY SUDDEN MOVEMENTS.
I SAY, I CERTAINLY WOULDN'T WANT TO MAKE ANY SUDDEN—
YAR!
I AM A BEAR!
THAT, THAT'S JUST SWELL.

I got back from ConnectiCon around 11:30 tonight.

I have spent the last 12 hours in an airport or an airplane.

After falling asleep around 7:30am.

You can do the math on that one.

So, I feel like shit for dumping you with no comic after two half-comics, but I stayed up for 28 hours straight four times in the last six days so I'm going to power through the guilt by sleeping.

In the meantime, I can tell you that 2005 will make many 8-bit fans very happy. There are Plans™!

I'll work up a real con report when the words stop doing that thing where they blur and dance in a blurry way. Y'know, while they're dancin'.

Here's the short version: When Tim Buckley sees a hole, he lets his instincts take over and he *goes* for it.

Octopus style.

IS THERE A PARTICULAR REASON WHY YOU ELECTED TO DISREGARD MY **INGENIOUS** PLOT AND, INSTEAD, LEAPT FROM THE TREES INSISTING THAT YOU WERE, IN FACT, A BEAR?

I COULD BARELY STAND YOUR PLAN.

WHAT?

I COULDN'T BEAR MY ROLE IN IT

STOP THAT

IT WAS SO GRIZZLY

I WILL TAKE YOU APART, IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER, IF YOU DO NOT DESIST

WHY DO YOU KEEP TALKING ABOUT BEARS?!

WHAT DO YOU FIND SO UNBEAR-ABLE?

THIS TEA IS LOVERLY!

SCONE?

I BARELY KNOW HOW TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTION BM.

YOU ALREADY DID THAT ONE!

DID I? I MUST HAVE A BEAR'S MEMORY.

YOU MEAN AN ELEPHANT'S MEMORY AND I HATE YOU.

AWW, C'MON.

GIMME A BEAR HUG!

THAT BERSERKER, HE'S SUCH A CARD

ONE SECOND, HE'S AN AXE WIELDING MURDER MACHINE, THE NEXT HE'S A CULTURED GENTLEMAN.

IT'S STRANGE FOR ONE MAN TO BE SO **POLAR** TO HIMSELF

DON'T YOU FELLOWS THINK?

BARELY

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BEWARE MY FELLOWS. TREAD LIGHTLY AND TRUE, FOR THE FOREST NEAR GURGU E'ER HAS BEEN KNOWN FOR ITS TREACHEROUS PATHS.

TIS INDEED THE DARKEST OF WOODS.

WE'RE NOT TOO WORRIED, THANKS.

I LIKE TO THINK I KNOW MY WAY AROUND A FOREST

Y'KNOW, SINCE THE ESSENCE OF MY BEING RESONATES WITH THE VERY *CONCEPT* OF "FOREST"

AND, FRANKLY, I'VE SEEN DARKER WOOD IN ELF PORN.

HORF!

YOUR ELF EYES DO SEE AS THE LIVING FOREST ITSELF, THAT MUCH IS CLEAR TO ME.

BUT THERE IS MUCH THAT YOU CANNOT SEE

MAN, I DIDN'T LOSE IT WHEN I CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF AN ELDER GOD DEFECATING.

YOU GOT IT ON MY SHOES.

IT SHAT ADVERTISING EXECUTIVES.

THEY'RE THE BOWEL OBSTRUCTION THAT KILLED THE OLD UNIVERSE

I'M SURE THE DARK WOODS OF GURGU ARE SCARY WHEN YOU'RE HUMAN, A CHILD, OR HAVE A HEART CONDITION...

..BUT I GREW UP ON THE ELVEN SIDE OF THE WORLD

WE'VE GOT HORRORS THEY DON'T EVEN HAVE *NAMES* FOR 'CAUSE THEY'VE BEEN AROUND SINCE BEFORE THERE WERE *WORDS*.

"A thousand shapes of horror beyond all memory. It was the pit — the maelstrom — the all-imagined abomination...it was the unnameable!"

—from the Journals of H.P. Elfcraft

Oh, just call me Theodore.

I DOUBT NOT THAT YOUR LAND IS A NOBLE YET DANGEROUS ONE.

BUT HERE, IN THE FOOTHILLS OF GURGU, WE HAVE A LAKE SO POISONED BY EVIL THAT *GLANCING* AT IT IS FATAL.

WHAT? THAT'S *THE* STUPIDEST LEGEND I'VE EVER HEARD

I MEAN, WHAT, IS IT SUPPOSED TO BE THAT LAKE? *G'HKKT!*

IT'S OKAY, EVERYONE.

HIS BRAIN'S JUST HEMMORAGING FROM AN ERRANT AXE SHARD WE'LL BE FINE.

I SAY!

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WE MAY BE TEMPORARILY DELAYED DUE TO YOUR FRIEND'S INJURY, BUT WE MUST LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE OF IT

WHAT, THAT THIEF WON'T BE TALKING FOR THE DURATION?

THAT'S WHAT WE CALL A ZING. BY THE WAY

WE MAY TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT EACH OF OUR GROUPS.

TO TRADE TALES OF OUR TRAVELS AND NEWS FROM ACROSS THE WORLD.

I'M SURE YOU LADIES MUST HAVE MANY ENTERTAINING STORIES TO TELL SINCE YOU ARE OBVIOUSLY FROM THE CIRCUS.

THERE ARE TWO THINGS WRONG WITH THAT SENTENCE, AND BOTH OF THEM ARE ALL OF IT

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK WE'RE LADIES?

RANGER AND YOUR THIEF FELLOW ARE MALE.

THAT'D BE STUPID

OH, I DON'T THINK THAT

RANGER EXPLAINED TO ME SOME TIME AGO THAT THOSE OF ELVEN DESCENT AREN'T NECESSARILY THE MOST MASCULINE IN APPEARANCE

SO WHY DO YOU THINK *WE'RE* GIRLS?

YOUR DISTINCT LACK OF BEARDS, OF COURSE

AND THIS FACT COMPLETELY OVERRIDES OUR LACK OF FEMALE SECONDARY SEXUAL CHARACTERISTICS, I.E. BOOBIES?

AYE.

AND THE WHOLE CIRCUS PERFORMERS THING?

WELL, I MEAN, LOOK AT YOU.

AS THEY SAY IN THE VERNACULAR, "ZING."

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AT LAST, OUR BAND OF WEARY TRAVELERS HAS ARRIVED AT THE VOLCANO OF GURGU!

I MUST SAY, I DOUBT YOU'LL FIND WORK HERE.

A VOLCANO IS NOT A GOOD PLACE FOR A CIRCUS.

DROP IT ALREADY!

IT IS WITH A HEAVY HEART, AND A BEARD OF WOE, THAT WE MUST NOW BID YOU FAREWELL.

FINALLY

BUT WHY!

WE MUST CONTINUE 'PON OUR OWN QUEST.

TO FIND OUR LOST COMPANIONS, CLERIC AND ROGUE!

AYE. THEY DEPARTED FOR DWARVEN LANDS LONG AGO

I HAD READIED THEM WITH AN OFFICIAL SEAL OF MY FAMILY, AXINHED, SO THEY COULD TRAVEL WITHOUT FEAR OF BEING STRUCK DOWN BY THE POPULACE.

AND YET WE HAVE HEARD NOTHING OF THEM SINCE THEY VENTURED INTO THE LANDS OF DWARF

MIGHT YOU BRING NEWS FROM THAT WAY?

YOU'RE GOING TO HEAR A LOT OF CRAZY THINGS.

MOSTLY, CRAZY TALK ABOUT DWARF LAND AND EVERYTHING IN IT BURNING TO THE GROUND.

WHICH IS CRAZY, AS WE DISCUSSED EARLIER.

DWARF LAND.. IN FLAMES?

LOOK, MISTAKES WERE MADE

I BLAME THE DWARVES, MYSELF

THEY *WERE* JUST STANDING THERE

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IF WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE, THEN I MUST VOW TO KILL THOSE WHO HAVE RUINED MY HOME-LAND!

GOOD LUCK FINDING THOSE GUYS, WHOM I WOULD HATE TO BE AND AM NOT AF-FILIATED WITH IN ANY WAY

SOME SAY THEY WERE FOUR MARAUDERS DISGUISED AS DO-GOODERS.

YOU ARE *TOTALLY* BLOWING OUR COVER

RELAX, I'M A LIAR, I KNOW WHAT I'M GETTING US INTO.

OTHERS, MOSTLY MYSELF, SAY IT WAS PROBABLY, IN FACT, YOUR BUDDY [redacted].

THAT'S MADNESS! I'VE BEEN HERE, WITH BERSERKER, ALL THIS TIME

IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO BURN DWARF LAND FROM HERE.

SOUNDS LIKE SOMEONE'S BEEN THINKING AN AWFUL LOT ABOUT HOW HE COULD BURN DWARF LAND

STRANGE THOUGHTS FOR AN ALLEGEDLY INNOCENT MAN TO HAVE

I'M TALKING!

LOGIC + = HA- ROOM!

BERSERKER, BOSOM CHUM, WHO WOULD YOU BELIEVE?

YOUR ADVENTURING COMPANION OR THESE COMPLETE STRANGERS?

THERE IS NO CHOICE FRIEND RANGER. MY TRUST IN YOU IS TOTAL.

WHICH IS *EXACTLY* HOW THAT CONNIVING SABO-TEUR WAS ABLE TO ACT AGAINST YOU ALL THIS TIME WITHOUT YOU SUS-PECTING ANY-THING!

FIEND!

BERSERKER!

WHAT ARE YOU-- NYA!

THAT WAS AMAZING.

OH, WE'VE DONE BETTER.

I WONDER HOW THE BEARDED WAR-RIORS ARE DOING THESE DAYS.

I'M SURE WE CAN EXPECT THEIR TRI-UMPHANT RE-TURN ANY DAY NOW!

PLUS, RED MAGE? YOU *CANNOT* TELL HIM THIS, BUT HE'S NOT ACTUALLY A CROSS DRESSER AND HE HAS NO DADDY ISSUES.

I'VE JUST BEEN MESSIN' WITH HIS HEAD

WOW.

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DID RANGER AND BERSERKER WANDER OFF WHILE I WAS ATTENDING TO THE MYSTERIOUS WOUNDS INFLICTED UPON FIGHTER AND RED MAGE?

THE ONLY MYSTERY IS HOW WE DIDN'T BREAK ANY BONES WHEN SHE SHOVED US.

OH, WANDERED OFF IS SUCH A STRONG WORD.

IT'S TWO WORDS.

I'M DYIN' OUT HERE, GAME OVER, MAN, GAME OVER!

GET OUT OF THE WAY BEFORE YOU HURT YOURSELF

WHITE MAGE, IT'LL BE BEST IF YOU HEAR THIS SHOCKING, ***BUT COMPLETELY BELIEVABLE***, NEWS FROM SOMEONE YOU KNOW AND KIND OF TRUST

OKAY.

RANGER AND BERSERKER WERE SPACE ALIENS FROM BEYOND THE MOON SENT HERE TO DEVOUR THE ONE FORCE THAT COULD STOP THEIR INVASION OF THE WORLD: THE LIGHT WARRIORS.

BUT THEN THEY DIED FROM A VIRUS THAT MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE BEEN DELIVERED VIA AN OTHERWISE INNOCUOUS OBJECT, LIKE, OH, LET'S SAY AN APPLE.

DO YOU THINK ME A FOOL?

WELL, YOU DIDN'T HAVE THE WISDOM TO BE BORN AN ELF, SO.

I TRUSTED THEM SO READILY WHEN THEY WERE SUCH A RISK TO YOUR DESTINY

I HAD MY SUSPICIONS OF THOSE TWO, I ADMIT, BUT TELL ME, WHAT FINAL PIECE OF EVIDENCE CAST THE LIGHT OF TRUTH ON THEIR ORIGINS?

THAT YOU BESTED THEM ONLY STRENGTHENS MY BELIEF IN YOU, OH WARRIORS OF LIGHT

EVIDENCE?

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WELL, IT LOOKS LIKE WE FOUND THE ENTRANCE TO GURGU VOLCANO.

THE PROBLEM IS, IT'S COVERED IN ANCIENT MYSTICAL RUNES THAT SPELL OUT SOME IMPOSSIBLE RIDDLE AND/OR CURSE UPON THOSE WHO SEEK ENTRANCE

EVEN *THAT* WOULDN'T BE MUCH OF A HINDRANCE SINCE WE'RE EQUIPPED WITH THIEF--

--WHO COULD WEASEL HIS WAY IN THROUGH OTHER, SNEAKY MEANS--

--AND RED MAGE, WHO COULD TRICK THE WORLD INTO THINKING HE KNEW WHAT HE WAS DOING JUST LONG ENOUGH TO GET AWAY WITH IT

SADLY, THE FORMER IS TRYING TO SELL WHITE MAGE ON HIS RIDICULOUS LIE AND HE NEEDS THE LATTER'S EXPERT TESTIMONY TO CORROBORATE HIS CLAIMS.

BERSERKER = RANGER =

AND SO, AS RED MAGE HAS *CLEARLY* ILLUSTRATED, RANGER AND BERSERKER WERE SPACE ALIEN INVADERS.

I DON'T THINK DRAWING A PICTURE COUNTS AS EVIDENCE, MR THIEF

WELL HOW ELSE DO YOU SUGGEST WE *DRAW* CONCLUSIONS?

SO WE'RE STUCK HERE.

ARE YOU SURE?

IT DOESN'T SOUND TOO COMPLICATED REALLY

"ASSUME THAT THE UNIVERSE HAS BEEN EXPANDING SINCE THE PLANCK TIME. CALCULATE THE NECESSARY VALUE FOR OMEGA (THE DENSITY OF THE UNIVERSE AS EXPRESSED BY A RATIO OF THE GRAVITATIONAL FORCES AND EXPULSION FORCES) FOR ALL OF CREATION TO NEITHER COLLAPSE NOR EXPAND INTO FORMLESS EMPTINESS EONS AGO. CALCULATE OMEGA FOR A UNIVERSE THAT DOES NOT EXPAND UNTIL AFTER THE PLANCK TIME. FAILURE TO SHOW YOUR WORK WILL RESULT IN YOUR MYSTERIOUS AND CONTRIVED DEATH."

WHAT THE *HELL* KIND OF ANCIENT PUZZLE IS *THAT*?! AND HOW THE *HELL* DID YOU READ IT?

WITH MY *EYES* DUH.

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SERIOUSLY, WHAT WAS WITH THAT?

I WAS AN OVER-COMPLICATIAN LAN-GUAGE MINOR IN COLLEGE

YOU NEVER **WENT** TO COLLEGE, FIGHTER.

IT'S AN OBSCURE LANGUAGE UTTERLY UNLIKE ANYTHING ELSE IN THE LINGUISTIC WORLD.

THEIR ALPHABET CONSISTS OF THREE HUNDRED SEVENTY-NINE CONSON-ANTS AND FOUR VOWELS.

THEY WRITE BACKWARDS EXCEPT FOR EVERY THIRD WORD WHICH IS PLACED AS IT WOULD HAVE BEEN NORMALLY

YOUR LIES ARE WITH-OUT MEANING TO ME

THEIR NATIONAL MASCOT IS THE FLAMINGOLOPE.

TINK TINK TINK TINK TINK TINK TINK

I AM OFFICIALLY IGNORING YOU NOW.

OKAY I SEEM TO RE-MEMBER SOME DEAD OLD KING GUY WHO, WHEN PRESENTED WITH A PROBLEM OF UNSOLVABLE PERPLEXITY, WOULD BLAZE A PATH TO VICTORY VIA STABBITY MEANS.

THEREFORE!

CREEEEEK

HEY, I HEARD YOU KNOCKING. COME ON IN.

IT'S TOASTY

I AM COMFORTABLE WITH TAKING FULL CREDIT FOR THE FEAT OF ENTRANCE BECAUSE THEN I GET TO IGNORE HOW OR WHY HE IS HERE

HEY, EVERYONE, BM FOUND BB.

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I'M SORRY, I CAN'T IGNORE THIS QUESTION. HOW DID **YOU** MAKE IT TO GURGU?

IT'S A MOUNTAIN STRONGHOLD IN THE EAST. I'M **FROM** A MOUNTAIN STRONGHOLD IN THE EAST HOW MANY OF THOSE DO YOU THINK THERE ARE ANYWAY?

MEANWHILE, A MOUNTAIN STRONGHOLD A LITTLE **FURTHER** TO THE EAST...

DO YOU KNOW WHO I WAS JUST THINKING OF?

DO TELL.

REMEMBER OUR GREATEST STUDENT?

WHY OF COURSE WE NAMED OUR ULTIMATE TITLE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT AFTER HIM.

CHRIS!

YES— **NO**, NOT CHRIS, YOU FOOL! BLACK BELT!

BUT I LIKED CHRIS.

YES, IT'S A SHAME WHAT HAPPENED. HE WASN'T NEARLY A MATCH FOR BLACK BELT

BUT WHY DO YOU BRING THIS UP NOW?

WE, THE ELDERS OF THE ULTIME FIGHTING STYLE ***WU XIA***, HAVE NOT SPOKEN THE NAME OF BLACK BELT IN QUITE SOME TIME

IT'S JUST THAT I SEE HIM OVER AT GURGU WITH MY SIGHT OF THE EAGLE'S CLAW TECHNIQUE

YOU WERE NEVER GOOD AT NAMING TECHNIQUES, Y'KNOW

THE POINT IS, HE MAY BE RETURNING AFTER ALL THIS TIME.

HE WAS ALWAYS SO FOCUSED IN THE WAYS OF FIGHTING THAT HE NEVER QUITE BOTHERED TO DIFFERENTIATE HIS ASS FROM A HOLE IN THE GROUND.

TRULY, I REMEMBER THE LAST TIME ANYONE SAW H.M. IT WAS GRADUATION.

HE NEVER QUITE GOT THERE WHEN HIS NAME WAS CALLED

BLACK BELT? BLACK BELT?

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SO THIS IS WHERE YOU TRAINED TO KILL?

YUP

IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE A DOJO.

WELL, WE DIDN'T HAVE LAVA THEN.

THERE WERE STUDENTS AND SENSEI IN THOSE DAYS TOO.

NOT TO MENTION SHRINES, TEMPLES, AND A MULTITUDE OF GARDENS TOO.

AND IT WAS MORE OF A SCHOOL AND LESS OF A VOLCANO.

SKREEEE!

FIRE MONSTERS ARE NEW

MUST BE PART OF THE NEW, EXPANDED CURRICULUM.

THIS IS NOT WHERE YOU TRAINED.

I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN.

FROM A METAPHYSICAL POINT OF VIEW, THINGS HAVE CHANGED HERE SO MUCH THAT IT'S NO LONGER THE PLACE I KNEW AS A YOUTH.

OR, Y'KNOW, IT'S THE WRONG PLACE

INDEED, A PLACE CAN CHANGE AS MUCH AS A MAN IN TIME.

CAN I EVEN SAY I'M THE SAME INDIVIDUAL AS THE NAIVE, LOST LITTLE BOY WHO USED TO TRAIN DAY AND NIGHT IN THESE VERY HALLS?

I TRIED BEING REASONABLE. YOU ALL SAW ME.

I HAVE NO OTHER RECOURSE BUT TO SHOVE HIM INTO THE LAVA.

CAN IT BE SAID THAT ANY OF US ARE TRULY WHO WE WERE AS CHILDREN?

HAS NOT THE WORLD AND OUR EXPERIENCES CHANGED US AS OUR CAPACITIES FOR INTELLECTUAL MATURITY INCREASED?

FALL OVER!

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THIEF AND I DID SOME SCOUTING AROUND.

HERE IS WHAT WE FOUND.

I'M SORRY IT'S NOT TO SCALE I WAS IN A RUSH.

YOUR LIFE IS FAIL-URE, BUT WE'RE USED TO IT I GUESS.

AT LEAST IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE MUCH LAVA.

I RAN OUT OF INK AND PAPER.

THERE'S BETWEEN 60 AND 8,000 SQUARE FEET OF LAVA.

I'M NO GOOD AT ESTIMA-TIONS.

I HADN'T NOTICED THERE'S ONLY ONE DRAGON AND WE'VE STILL GOT THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE.

NO. HE POSED FOR THAT SHOT

US

LAVA

FIRE DRAGON OF DOOM

OH GOOD I WAS WORRIED THIS WAS GOING TO BE DIFFI-CULT

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THE SECOND X-S[illegible]ME BY RYAN SOSA

AUGUST 22, 200[illegible]

DEATH

LIST FIVE

1. FREA[illegible]NG
2. MOO
3. M O D
4. R A D
5. EN SABA NUR

IN 2006 BRAND-X WILL

KILL

APOCALYPSE

OUR PRIMARY CONCERN IS THE GIANT LAKE OF LAVA AND HOW WE WI... CROSS IT

SILLY ME, I'D HAVE THOUGHT THE ENORMOUS FIRE DRAGON ON THE OTHER SIDE WOULD MERIT *SOME* WORRY

IT CERTAINLY DOES, BUT NOT UNTIL WE CROSS THE LAVA.

WOW. YOU MADE A GOOD POINT I'M BESIDE MYSELF WITH AWE

I COULD LURE THE DRAGON TO OUR SIDE BY TAUNTING HIM WITH MY RAPIER ELVEN WIT

I THOUGHT I WAS NEXT TO YOU.

SMACK!

THEN WE COULD TAKE HIM DOWN ON OUR OWN TERMS.

I THOUGHT ABOUT THAT AS WELL, BUT THE FURTHER WE ARE FROM THE DRAGON, THE BETTER

IN FACT, ONCE WE GET THERE, OUR PLAN OF ATTACK MAY LOOK SUSPICIOUSLY LIKE A PLAN OF SNEAKING AWAY

THE MAIN ADVANTAGE WE HAVE ON THIS SIDE, OTHER THAN NOT HAVING TO DEAL WITH THE LAVA *OR* THE DRAGON, IS THAT WE STILL POSSESS A MEANS OF RETREAT

IF WE BRING THE DRAGON HERE, THERE'S A CHANCE WE'LL BE TRAPPED BETWEEN A DRAGON AND A LAKE OF LAVA.

CHECK OUT THE BRAIN ON RM. IT'S NOT *NEARLY* AS DAMAGED AS ALL HIS PREVIOUS BEHAVIOR HAD LED US TO BELIEVE

DOES ANYONE ELSE SMELL DRAGON?

I ONLY SMELL YOUR *STUPITOSIS*. WHICH IS ANOTHER WAY OF SAYING YOUR BREATH IS STUPID, *STUPID*

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YOU SEEM UPSET ABOUT SOMETHING.

I'VE BEEN THINKING, BLACK BELT

IF, AND THIS IS ONLY AN "IF", MIND YOU. BUT IF THESE AREN'T THE REAL LIGHT WARRIORS, IS IT NECESSARILY WRONG FOR US TO HELP THEM?

IT SHOOTS FIRE FROM ITS MOUTH AND BLEEDS ACIDIC LAVA. RUN FOR YOUR PATHETIC LIVES!

BUT THEY MET ALL OF THE PROPHECY'S PREDICTIONS, RIGHT?

THEY HAVE ORBS OF LIGHT AND THEY WERE APPOINTED BY THE GREATEST KING IN THE LAND

I INVENTED EATING, YOU KNOW SINGLEHANDEDLY SOLVED STARVATION.

IT'S HOW I GOT VOTED INTO OFFICE

WE DON'T VOTE FOR KINGS, SIR.

THEN EXPLAIN THIS CAMPAIGN SHIRT

Don't Blame Me, I Voted For King Steve

YES, I KNOW. BUT, PLEASE, JUST INDULGE ME

USE YOUR WEAPONS, THEY ARE DESIGNED TO INFLICT DAMAGE!

HISTORY WOULD REMEMBER THE WRONG HEROES. BUT THOSE WHO ARE GIVEN THE GLORY ARE IRRELEVANT TO THE DEED

YOU ARE STEEPED IN WISDOM, BLACK BELT

OUR WEAPONS ARE USELESS. RELIANCE UPON THEM IS DEATH

YEAH, I SWEAT WISDOM FOR BREAKFAST.

...WHAT?

NO, WAIT I EAT BREAKFAST FOR SUSTENANCE SWEAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH IT

IT HAS EXPOSED ITS WEAK, FLESHY UNDERBELLY TO ME IN THE FORM OF ITS DIGESTIVE TRACT!

UGH. WHY AM I ASKING YOU FOR ADVICE?

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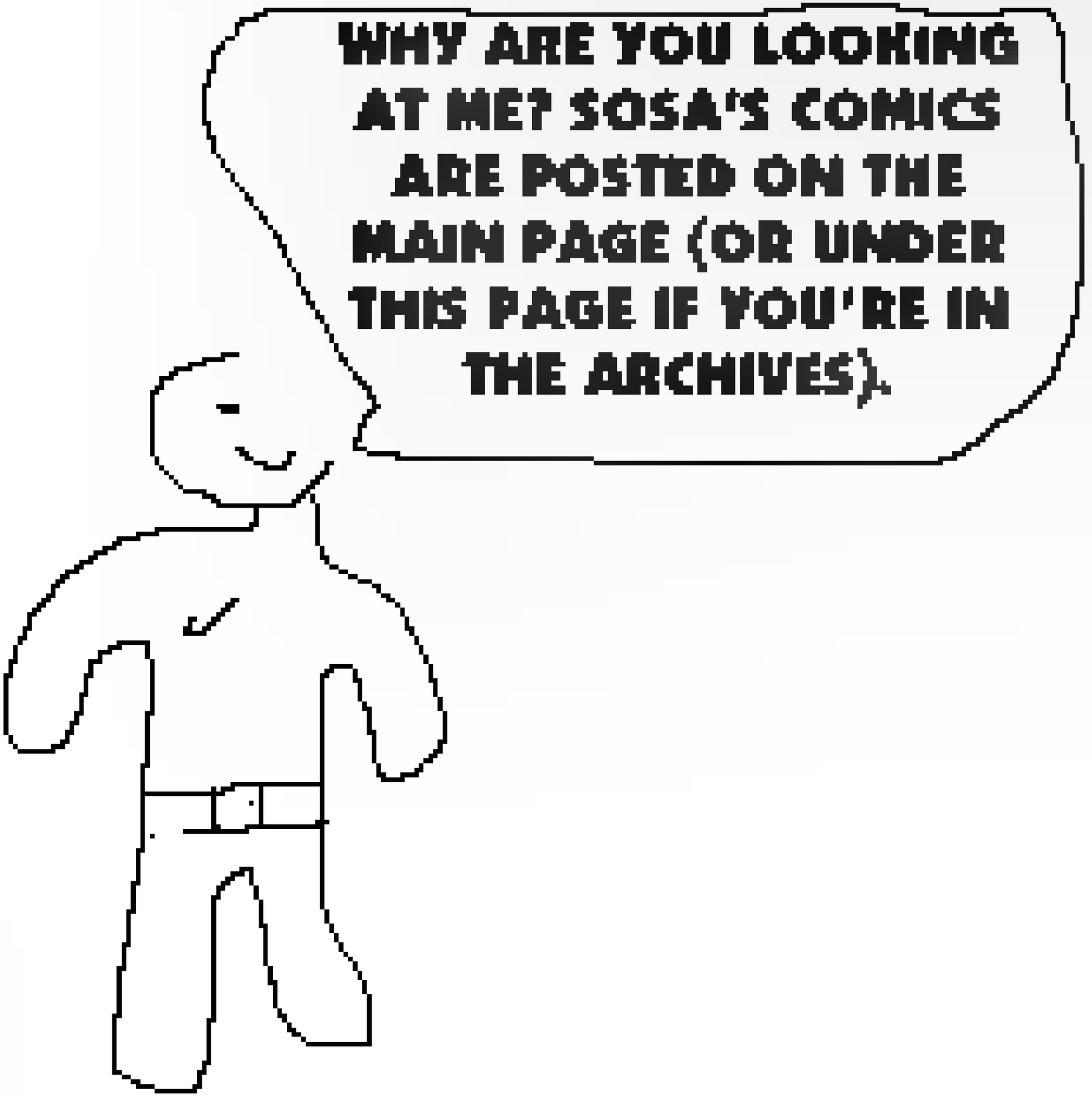
WHY ARE YOU LOOKING AT ME? SOSA'S COMICS ARE POSTED ON THE MAIN PAGE (OR UNDER THIS PAGE IF YOU'RE IN THE ARCHIVES).

MINUTES LATER...

AGAIN, I MUST APOLOGIZE FOR EATING YOUR FRIEND I'M NOT INHERENTLY VIOLENT, BUT HE CAME AFTER ME WITH MAGIC AND STEEL.

WE UNDERSTAND. YOU'RE A DRAGON. YOU SEE SOME NUT WAVING A SWORD. CERTAIN INSTINCTS KICK IN.

I THANK YOU FOR YOUR UNDERSTANDING, BUT I'M JUST SICK ABOUT THE WHOLE THING ALL THE SAME PLEASE, LET ME MAKE IT UP TO YOU.

NOT YOUR FAULT AT ALL

DRAGONS ARE WELL KNOWN FOR THEIR ***OBSCENE*** TREASURE TROVES. THEY MAKE KINGS LOOK LIKE THE KIND OF STREET PEOPLE WHO ARE SO POOR THEY CAN ONLY BEG FOR MONIES FROM OTHER, LESS POOR STREET PEOPLE

WHAT?

HE'S PROBABLY RICH.

RICH, SHMICH. HE'S A DRAGON. HIS ENTIRE BIOLOGY IS A GIANT SYSTEM OF RARE, NIGH-IMPOSSIBLE TO ACQUIRE MAGICAL COMPONENTS.

WHAT?

WE'LL HAVE HIM COMMIT HONORABLE SEPPUKU AND STRIP HIS CARCASS TO THE BONE

I COULDN'T HELP BUT OVER HEAR YOUR PLANS TO ABUSE MY GENEROSITY. MIGHT I SUGGEST THAT YOU AVOID SUCH LINES OF THOUGHT UNLESS YOU WISH TO END YOUR LIVES.

I'M SORRY, MR. DRAGON. MY "FRIENDS" CAN BE A LITTLE UNCOUTH.

ALL WE REALLY DESIRE IS PASSAGE TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS CAVE. PERHAPS YOU COULD CARRY US?

OH, I'M AFRAID NOT

I HAVE LAVA FOR BLOOD, AND IT'D PROBABLY KILL YOU TO TOUCH ME.

BUT IT'S A SIMPLE TASK TO SHED A FEW SCALES AND MELD THEM INTO ARMOR FOR YOU.

ONCE THEY COOL, THEY'LL PROTECT YOU FROM THE INTENSE HEAT OF THIS CAVE

THERE YOU GO

SNUG!

NOW TO START THE NEXT ONE.

URG, SEEM TO HAVE SOME HEARTBURN.

DID YOU HAVE SOME MEXICAN FOOD? IT DOES THAT TO ME TOO.

A FIRE DRAGON'S ORGANS ARE VULNERABLE TO ICE SPELLS.

I AM A GENIUS!

NOT MEXICAN...

WELL, SUCKS TO BE YOU NON-FIRE ARMORED SUCKERS.

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YOU'VE DONE A VERY STUPID THING, RM.

THE LINE BETWEEN GENIUS AND STUPIDITY IS DRAWN BY VISION.

AND LET ME TELL YOU, THE VIEW FROM INSIDE A DRAGON'S DIGESTIVE TRACT IS FILLED WITH INSIGHT

THIEF?

NO, IT'S FILLED WITH GUTS, HE'S STUPID

WELL, FIGHTER IS THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN SAFELY TRAVERSE THE LAVA.

YOU THINKING WHAT I'M THINKING, THIEF?

WAY AHEAD OF YOU.

HI GUYS!

I SAID HI!

HOLD TIGHT!

HOLD TIGHT?

WE TAPED DAGGERS TO HIS HANDS, HE CAN'T *HELP* BUT HOLD ON TO THEM.

IT SEEMED LIKE THE NICE THING TO SAY

AFTER THROWING HIM FACE FIRST INTO A ROCK WALL ON THE OTHER SIDE OF A GIANT SEA OF FIRE?

YES.

ANYONE?

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OKAY, FIGHTER, TIE THIS TO SOMETHING STURDY SO WE CAN CLIMB ACROSS.

ON IT LIKE STINK ON RICE!

UM, YEAH OKAY.

DONE

WHY IS THE ROPE ON FIRE?

I TIED IT TO THE LAVA!

Y'KNOW, SO WE COULD FIND IT WHEN WE'RE DONE HERE.

HERE'S A ***NEW*** PLAN TO DISTRACT ME FROM CONTEMPLATING MURDER.

BLACK BELT, ***YOU*** HOLD ON TO THE ROPE FOR US.

NO PROBLEM.

"NO, I DON'T WANT TO LEARN A TELEPORTATION SPELL," I SAID "THAT'D BE ONE LESS DOOM SPELL," I SAID.

THOSE ARE ONLY MY FRAGILE HANDS.

STEP ALL OVER THEM, IT'S COOL.

JERKS

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AT LEASE ONE GOOD THING CAME OUT OF THIS.

I GOT TO LOOK UP WHITE MAGE'S ROBES.

NO YOU DIDN'T

MY ROBES ARE ARRANGED WITH DECENCY IN MIND

I'M A WHITE MAGE, NOT SOME SPOILED PRINCESS **WHORE** ON SPRING BREAK.

PIG.

DADDY BUYS MY LOVE NOT UNLIKE THE FRAT GUYS WHO BUY MY AFFEC-TION ONE DRINK AT A TIME.

YES, I DO.

BUT YOU DON'T KNOW FOR *SURE!*

YEAH, I'VE GOT NUTHIN'

JUST HURRY BEFORE SOMEONE, SUCH AS MYSELF, CUTS THE ROPE

MINUTES LATER

HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET BLACK BELT ACROSS TOO?

I LIKE TO CLASSIFY THAT AS "HIS PROBLEM."

HI, GUYS.

HOW, YOU, HERE, WHAT?

I HELD THE ROPE UP AND WALKED ACROSS JUST LIKE YOU GUYS.

THAT DOESN'T I MEAN, YOU CAN'T

C'MON, LET'S STOP WAST-ING TIME WITH YOUR INCOMPLETE SEN-TENCES AND FINISH THIS QUEST

BUT... WE TOOK THE ROPE **DOWN** ON THIS END

BUT I DON'T THINK **HE** KNEW THAT

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BELLSOUTH
We Don't Know What We're Doing

LEFT HAND MAN GARY. TELL ME HOW THE ELECTIONS ARE GOING.

DAD, IT'S ME, SARA. YOUR DAUGHTER.

YOU DIDN'T TELL ME YOU WERE ALSO MY DAUGHTER, GARY!

PULLING DOWN TWO JOBS? YOU ARE QUITE THE WORKER AND DESERVE TO BE REWARDED WITH DOUBLE YOUR PAY

I DON'T THINK YOU'RE LISTENING.

I'M A KING! LISTENING IS FOR OTHER PEOPLE.

BUT YOU HEARD *THAT.*

HEARD

LISTENING.

OTHER PEOPLE.

KING.

WHAT-- STEVEBOT 07! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO HIM, GARY!

I'M YOUR DAUGHTER!

THIS ISN'T A TIME FOR YOUR "DAUGHTER" SHENANIGANS, GARY STEVEBOT 07 IS DEAD!

I'LL HAVE TO DOCK YOU THE INCREASE IN PAY I TALKED ABOUT EARLIER AND COULDN'T POSSIBLY KNOW ABOUT RIGHT NOW.

YOU DO THAT

OH WHAT A TRAGEDY!

AND TO BEFALL US DURING THE ALREADY FRANTIC ELECTION YEAR! I DO HOPE IT'S NOT AN OMEN.

YOU'RE NOT RUNNING AGAINST ANYONE, WE HAVE **NO** SYSTEM FOR VOTING, AND KINGS AREN'T ELECTED ANYWAY!

OH, STEVEBOT 07 YOU WERE TOO BEAUTIFUL FOR THIS WORLD

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HALT, FELLOWS. MY KEEN SCOUT SENSES I'VE JUST RECENTLY HONED ALERT UNTO ME THE PRESENCE OF A TRAP MOST FOUL

I SWEAR TO CHAOS, IF HE SAYS LAVA *ONE* MORE TIME, I'...

AHEAD, WHERE THE GROUND TIS, IT TRULY *TISN'T*

WHAT MADNESS!

IT CANNOT BE!

YOUR WORDS ARE LIES!

HE'S DOING IT HE WISHES TO DIE HE'S GOING TO SAY LAVA

FOR YOU SEE, SOMEONE HAS CLEVERLY REPLACED THAT SECTION OF GROUND WITH A GIANT LAKE OF *LAVA*.

IMPOSSIBLE!

THIS WAY! MADNESS!

THE HORROR!

WHAT IS *WRONG* WITH YOU PEOPLE?

MORE TO THE POINT, WHAT *WARPED* MIND DREAMED OF PUTTING LAVA WHERE THE GROUND OUGHT TO BE?

YES, *WHO* COULD HAVE FORESEEN THAT THERE'D BE LAVA?

INSIDE OF A *VOL-CANO*!

SOME SORT OF MADMAN, I'D SAY

GHK!

IT DOESN'T STRIKE YOU AS ENTIRELY *ROUTINE* THAT WE SHOULD RUN INTO A LAKE MADE OF LAVA?

Y'KNOW, WHILE WE'RE INSIDE A BIG VOLCANO?

ESPECIALLY AFTER THE OTHER FOUR, *NOT* INCLUDING THE ONE WE RAN INTO *TWICE* BECAUSE RED MAGE--

RED SCOUT

BECAUSE RED *MORON* COULDN'T FIND HIS OWN STAFF WITH A DETAILED MAP?

TO WIT

"X MARKS THE SPOT." THAT COULD MEAN ANYTHING!

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WE CAN CROSS THIS LAVA LAKE, BUT IT WON'T BE EASY

THERE'S A NARROW BUT EASILY TRAVERSABLE LAND BRIDGE OFF TO THE SIDE WE'LL USE THAT

WE'LL HAVE TO CONSTRUCT SOME SORT OF CRUDE SUSPENSION BRIDGE USING NOTHING BUT OUR WITS AND A FEW ROCKS

OH, THERE ARE OBSTACLES WE'LL HAVE TO OVERCOME

FORE-MOST AMONG THEM, THE SHEER IM-POSSIBILITY OF BUILDING A SUSPENSION BRIDGE EXCLUSIVELY OUT OF ROCK.

LAND BRIDGE!

I WON'T LIE TO YOU.

SOME OF US WON'T MAKE IT TO THE OTHER SIDE

LOOK, FIGHTER ALREADY CROSSED BLACK BELT AND WHITE MAGE ARE ***HALF WAY*** THERE.

BUT I'LL CARRY THAT WEIGHT

I'LL SEE THEM THROUGH TO THAT FAR SHORE. IT'S THE LEAST I CAN DO

DO THE THINGS YOU SAY MAKE SENSE TO YOU?

DO THEY JUST KIND OF HAPPEN INDEPENDENT OF WHATEVER COGNITIVE RESOURCES YOU POSSESS, HOWEVER LIMITED THEY MAY BE?

THEIR SACRIFICES SHALL BE SO THAT WE MAY LIVE.

WE OWE IT TO THEM TO MAKE OUR LIVES MEAN SOMETHING MORE!

IT'S THE LATTER, I TAKE IT.

YEAH, GOOD LUCK WITH THAT. TRY NOT TO STARVE TO DEATH ***TOO*** SOON

I LIKE TO THINK YOU'LL SUFFER FOR AN UNEC-ESSARILY PROLONGED PERIOD BEFORE DYING OF YOUR OWN STUPIDITY.

HEY, WAIT UP!

WE NEED TO DECIDE WHO THE ON-SITE MANAGER IS!

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OKAY, THERE'S A GROUP OF MONSTERS AHEAD

BEYOND THEM LIES THE CHAMBER WHEREIN THE ORB OF FIRE IS CONTAIN-ED

HOW CAN YOU BE SURE?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

I'M SURE OF EVERYTHING I SAY!

OH NO YOU DON'T BRAIN YOU STAY

LOOK [illegible] TH,S.

WE NEED ONLY JUMP INTO THEM AS ONE UNIFIED FIGHT-ING FORCE OF DOOM.

THUS [illegible] TAKEN ENTIRELY BY SURPRISE AND WE SHALL WIN THE DAY

YAY, RED MAGE!

WOW, WHAT A BRILLIANT COURSE OF ACTION, RM!

BUT IT WAS MY IDEA!

BATTLE POSES, EVERY-ONE MAKE IT GOOD!

ON THE COUNT OF THREE, WE ATTACK

COUNTING TO THREE THAT'S SO ME!

WHERE'S FIGHTER?

HEY, MONSTERS. I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT YOU'RE ABOUT TO GET THE BIG-GEST AMBUSH,NG OF YOUR HIDEOUS LIVES!

YOU AND WHAT ARMY, HU-MAN?

THE LIGHT WARRIORS.

OVER THERE

CHANGING TARGET.

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AND THEN AN EPIC BATTLE HAPPENED!

STAY IN FORM-ATION!

WAIT, WHAT'S HAP-PENING?

MUCH TO THE DISMAY OF THE LIGHT WARRIORS.

SLAUGHTER!

WOW, FIGHTER YOU DON'T HALF-ASS SCREWING UP, DO YA?

WHEN YOU GOTTA DO SOMETHIN' WRONG, YOU GOTTA DO IT RIGHT!

UGH. WHAT HAPPENED? I THINK I PASSED OUT

WE ALL PASSED OUT

THOSE MONSTERS SLAUGHTERED US.

YEAH, NO THANKS TO FIGHTER MORON.

TECHNICALLY IT'S COMPLETELY THANKS TO H.M.

WELL WHATEVER! THE POINT IS HERE IS WHERE WE ARE.

BRILLIANT DEDUCTION. ANY IDEA WHERE HERE MIGHT BE?

IT'S DARK AND CRAMPED

AND SEXY

YOU SAID THAT WAS NOT YOUR HAND, BLACK MAGE.

WHAT? IT'S NOT I THOUGHT YOU WERE TOUCHING ME

BY THE SEVEN PRAYERS, NO

THEN WHO IS TOUCHING ME?

HIYA!

DAMMIT, FIGHTER!

WE'RE HUGGING!

YES. YES, WE'RE HUGGING. YOU KEEPING MY ARMS PINNED DOWN IS THE ONLY THING KEEPING YOU ALIVE

MAYBE THEY'RE TAKING US TO A SURPRISE PARTY!

IT FEELS LIKE WE'RE MOVING. ANYONE KNOW WHY?

ENOUGH HOMOEROTICISM FOR NOW

JUST SHUT UP, FIGHTER AND LET GO OF ME.

KARY'S LUNCH

DRAG DRAG

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OH GREAT ONE, OH HOLDER OF THE SACRED FLAME, OH KNOWER OF MYSTERIES, WE HAVE BROUGHT FORTH A MIGHTY SACRIFICE.

OH POWERFUL KARY, FIEND OF THE ETERNAL FLAME!

WE, YOUR LOYAL MONSTER SERVANTS BRING A BOUNTY OF ADVEN-- TURERS FROM THE CAVES.

WHZHKK

DID THEY FALL TO THE DRAGON OF LIVING FLAMES I SUMMONED FROM THE DEPTHS OF HE...?

YOU FORGOT PRETTY

YES. SO, AS BILL WAS SAYING:

RUDY? NO, I DON'T THINK SO.

THEN CLEARLY IT WAS MY INGENIUS LAVA TRAPS! FOR THEY WERE PLACED WHERE IT WOULD BE MORE CONVENIENT FOR THERE TO BE GROUND BUT RATHER IT WAS LAVA!

THEY DIDN'T SEEM TERRIBLY PUT OUT LAVA-WISE. WE PRETTY MUCH DID ALL THE WORK OUR-- SELVES

WHAT A BUNCH OF JERKS AM I RIGHT?

SERIOUSLY, WE FOUND THESE GUYS, UTTERLY SLAIN OF COURSE, AND DRAGGED THEM HERE FOR YOU TO FEAST UPON, ETC., ETC.

ALSO, YOU'RE LOOKING LOVELY TODAY, OH QUEEN OF THE FLAME.

SYLSHIT

REALLY, ALL WE DID WAS FINISH THE JOB YOUR TRAPS AND DRAGON HAD STARTED.

SYCOPHANT

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MINIONS! BRING THE VICTIMS TO ME!

MINIONS! WHAT IS TAKING YOU SO LONG?

DO YOU WISH TO EXPERIENCE MY IRE?

LET ME ASSURE YOU IT'S NO COINCIDENCE IT RHYMES WITH FIRE!

YOUR HUMBLE SERVANT WISHES PERMISSION TO SPEAK

IT IS GRANTED. BUT KNOW THAT THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF THIS VERBAL CONTRACT ARE SUCH THAT I MAY CHANGE THEM AT ANY MOMENT WITHOUT WARNING.

YES, I--

BOOM

YOU WERE WARNED

UH, KARY. HI JEFF FROM ACCOUNTING?

WE MET AT THE VOLCANO PARTY LAST MONTH? UM.

YOU WERE ROASTING SOME OF MY CO-WORKERS ALIVE, YOU PROBABLY DON'T REMEMBER.

THERE WAS ROASTING.

WELL, IT'S JUST THAT, AS FAR AS MINIONS GO, YOU DON'T HAVE ANY

HOW CAN THIS BE!

I HAVE A HOST, A LEGION OF FOUL BEASTS SUMMONED FROM THE ASHES OF A THOUSAND EVIL FIRES BURNING FROM A THOUSAND EVIL TREES STOLEN FROM THE EVIL FOREST OF BUNNY TOWN.

MEANWHILE, IN BUNNY TOWN.

I JUST HEARD BACK FROM THE TOURISM BOARD WE'RE TAKING IT IN THE PANTS. AGAIN.

FOR THE LOVE OF HIPPITY-HOP, WE LIVE IN AN EVIL FOREST!

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YES, YOU *HAD* QUITE A FEW EMPLOY-EES.

BUT THEN YOU STARTED KILLING THEM INDISCRIM-INATELY

I'M EVIL. KILLING MINIONS FOR THE SLIGHTEST INDISCRETION, OR NO-THING AT ALL, IS WHAT I DO TO MAKE SURE EVERYONE *KNOWS* I'M EVIL.

YOU SENT POSTCARDS FOR THAT EXPRESS PURPOSE!

TO EVERYONE!

JUST SUNN GURU

I HAVE TO MAKE SURE NO ONE THINKS I'M SLACKING ON THIS EVIL GIG.

I'M A FIEND OF FIRE KILLING PEOPLE WITH COMBUSTION IS GOING TO HAPPEN.

Wish you were here!

YES, AND IT'S HAPPENED SO *MUCH* YOU'VE RUN OUT OF MINIONS TO K---.

NOT YET I HAVEN'T

BUT I'M THE ONLY..

OH.

NOW TO SEE ABOUT THAT SACRIFICIAL LUNCH.

I THINK SHE MEANS US.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT A THING. JUST FOLLOW MY LEAD

WHY AM I FILLED WITH DREAD EVERY TIME ONE OF YOU *THROW BACKS* SAYS SOME-THING LIKE THAT?

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OKAY, WHEN SHE OPENS THE BAG, JUST USE YOUR ANCIENT ELVEN STEALTH TECHNIQUE YOU HONED TO PERFECTION DURING YOUR YEARS OF WANDERING THE COUNTRYSIDE AS A ROGUE

WHAT IF YOU WENT TO THE BLACK MAGIC ACADEMY?

Y'KNOW, IN LIEU OF BEING AN ELF

I'LL *LEND* YOU MY STEALTH.

LIKE FLASH AND THE SPEED FORCE! IT'S SO STUPID IT *HAS* TO WORK!

THAT'S NOT A REMOTELY SOUND BASIS FOR *ANY*THING.

TOO LATE, GO!

DAMMIT, THIEF!

WHAT ARE YOU DO-ING?

WE'RE ESCAPING?

IS THAT A FACT?

WALL OF FLAMES!

AWW.

YOU KNOW, CUTTING OFF THE ONLY MEANS OF ESCAPE CONSTI-TUTES A FIRE SAFETY HAZARD

PROBABLY DOUBLY SO SINCE THAT'S A CIRCLE OF FIRE

SMACK!

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LOOK, I HAVEN'T KILLED ANYTHING IN ABOUT THREE MINUTES, SO MY PATIENCE IS *NIL* AT THIS POINT

THAT'S WHAT I DO.

SWO[illegible]SHUCKS

BLACK MAGE LIKES IT WHEN I TALK...

FIRE IS HOT.

NEVER LIE TO [illegible]

SHE SEEMS REASONABLE

LET'S REASON WITH HER USING OUR REASON.

GOOD LUCK, LADY

OR WE COULD CHOOSE LIFE OVER DEATH AND ACTUALLY DO SOMETHING *SMART* FOR A CHANGE OF PACE

AND HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO DO SMART THINGS? JUST *THINK* THEM UP?

BLACK BELT, STOP HER WITH YOUR VIOLENCE.

WITH GUSTO!

THUP
THUP
THUP
THUP

WHY DO THEY COME TO ME TO DIE?

LEAP!

YAR!

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LIFE IS FUNNY

YOU START OUT WITH LIMITLESS POTENTIAL. BUT TIME IS ALWAYS SHAVING AWAY THE POSSIBILITIES.

EVERY CHOICE YOU MAKE IS THE CHOICE NOT TO DO A THOUSAND OTHER THINGS.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT, WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE, IS THAT YOU MADE A DIFFERENCE

YOUR CHOICES, AND EVERYTHING UNDONE, HAVE TO *MEAN* SOMETHING. OTHERWISE, WHAT WAS THE POINT?

I'M LUCKY THAT WAY MY PATH WAS ALREADY THERE.

I HAD ONLY TO WALK IT

I OFTEN THOUGHT EVEN IF **NO ONE** KNEW OF THE GOOD I HAD DONE WITH MY LIFE, IT DIDN'T MATTER.

THAT IT WAS DONE IS ALL THAT COUNTS IN THE END

BUT THEN I DIED

BLACK BELT?

AND I HADN'T GOTTEN TO DO ANY OF IT YET

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MAN DOWN, MAN DOWN!

FORM A DEFENSIVE PERIMETER!

I CAN'T DO THIS! HE'S IN PIECES!

IF WE LIVE THROUGH THIS, THIEF DIES.

FALL BACK, RE-GROUP!

HE WON'T STOP BLEEDING!

FALL BACK TO WHAT?!

WE'RE STUCK BE-WEEN LAVA AND A HOT PLACE

WE CAN *USE* THAT!

USE THAT?!

WHAT'S THE PLAN? JUMP TO OUR DEATH BE-FORE KARY KILLS US?

HELP

WE COULD LURE HER INTO THE LAVA.

YOU COULD SHUT UP

SWORD CHUCKS, YO.

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"HOW MANY SCHOOLS OF JUDAISM KENSHIDO ARE THERE?"

IT'S SO OBVIOUS NOW.

THERE AREN'T ANY IT'S ALL IN HERE.

AT LEAST HIS DEATH WASN'T IN VAIN.

HE STOPPED ME FROM VENTURING OUT OF MY VOLCANO TO MURDER EVERY LIVING THING I FIND

I MEAN, OBVIOUSLY I'M GOING TO GO DO THAT *NOW*, BUT HE STOPPED ME FOR NEARLY A WHOLE MINUTE

WELL, YOU'VE SURE BEATEN US, KARY NOTHING LEFT TO DO BUT

ICE!

FROZEN

I'M LIVING FIRE YOU DIDN'T THINK IT WAS GOING TO BE THAT EASY, DID YOU?

YOU KNOW, FOR A SECOND THERE YEAH, I KINDA DID

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE, SHE'LL PROBABLY KILL YOU FIRST NOW SO AT LEAST I'LL GET TO WATCH YOU DIE

NOT THIS TIME, I'M AFRAID.

BLACK MAGE INITIATE PLAN 9.

FROM OUTER SPACE?

THE SAME

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THE PLAN IS AS SIMPLE AS IT IS INGENIUS, BM.

OH GOOD, I FEARED A PROLONGED DEATH.

FIRST, YOU TAKE MY BAG OF HOLDING, THEN WE--

THE HILARIOUS-- AND SOON TO BE TERMINALLY TRAGIC-- PART OF ALL THIS IS THAT *THIEF* HAS IT

OH. OH DEAR GOD

OKAY, *YOU* STALL KARY WHILE I THINK

GOOD LUCK WITH THAT

I CAN MAKE YOUR ORGANS EXPLODE WITH BUT A THOUGHT

LADY, IF YOU WEREN'T TRYING TO KILL ME, AND HALF MADE OUT OF SNAKE, I'D BE ON YOU LIKE BLOOD ON MY KNIFE.

IT'S BEEN ENTIRELY TOO LONG SINCE ONE OF YOU DIED.

SEE! IT'S NOT JUST ME! HE *NEVER* DIES!

YAR!

WAIT, HOW MANY SWORDS IS HE USING ANYWAY?

SHUT UP AND THINK OF SOMETHING WHILE I RUN THE HELL AWAY!

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KTANG!

SLICE!

TING!

BATTLE

COUNTER!

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HEY GUYS. DID I MISS ANY-THING?

THIEF?! I THOUGHT YOU RAN OFF LIKE THE COWARD YOU ARE

AND *YOU* WOULDN'T HAVE RUN FOR IT?

DON'T CHANGE THE SUBJECT

ANYWAY, I HAD SOME IMPOR-TANT BUS.NESS TO HANDLE

SUCH AS?

ONLY THE THEFT OF THE ORB OF FIRE!

MY SACK!

HE'S NOT TALKING ABOUT A PERSONAL PROBLEM. *IS* HE?

GOD. I HOPE NOT

SILENCE, FOOLS! THE PLAN MUST GO INTO EFFECT!

YOU MEAN THE ONE WHERE WE LEAVE FIGHTER HERE LOCKED IN A STALEMATE UNTIL HIS ARMS FALL OFF?

THE ONE WHERE WE GO BACK TO TOWN AND KILL RED MAGE AND THIEF IN THEIR SLEEP?

NO, THE ONE WHERE I CAST ICE-9

BLARG, I NEED ARMS.

I ARE STARVED.

I TOO ARE STARVED.

HOLD IT, CUPCAKE

ICE-9? THE SPELL IS ONLY A THEORY. IT'S NEVER BEEN CAST AND WITH GOOD REASON. IT WOULD FREEZE EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

THAT'S WHAT THE BAG OF HOLDING IS FOR

OH, GOOD FOR A MOMENT THERE, I WAS AFRAID YOUR IDIOTIC PLAN WOULD DOOM US ALL.

BUT WE HAVE A ***HAND-BAG*** ON OUR SIDE. MY WORRIES ARE UNFOUNDED

JUST BE CAREFUL WITH THIS THING.

I'VE STUFFED MORE RICHES IN THERE THAN ACTUALLY EXISTS.

THEY'LL BE ***PRESERVED***, I ASSURE YOU.

WHAT AN ODD STATEMENT. YET MY CONCERNS ARE PUT TO REST BY IT.

NOW, STEP ONE: BAG 'ER!

WELL, HE'S AS GOOD AS DEAD

HEH, HE WON'T BE THE FIRST

SEE WHAT I DID THERE? LI'L BLACK BELT REFERENCE FOR YA.

IT'S FUNNY BECAUSE HE'S DEAD

SERIOUSLY THOUGH, I'LL ALWAYS CARRY A PIECE OF BLACK BELT WITH ME.

'CAUSE IT WON'T WASH OUT!

GO AHEAD AND LAUGH, THIEF, WHITE MAGE WILL NEVER HEAR YOU OVER THE ROAR OF HER FAILURE.

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YOU ARE A SKILLED OPPONENT, FIGHTER. I'LL GRANT YOU THAT

BUT YOU ARE ONLY MORTAL.

WHILE I, KARY, FIEND OF THE FLAMES, HAVE THE STRENGTH OF AN INEXTINGUISHABLE INFERNO!

YOU'RE BORING ME, LADY

BUT THERE'S JUST ONE LAST THING I NEED FROM YOU.

OH?

DON'T WORRY, YOU'LL BE DONE IN A SECOND

THISSLE SHOVE

WE'VE LOCKED KARY IN AN INESCAPABLE PRISON WHERE SHE SHALL REMAIN UNTIL SUCH TIME AS WE ARE POWERFUL ENOUGH TO DEFEAT HER. QUITE SIMPLE

DON'T WORRY THIEF. MY INTELLECT HAS THOUGHT OF EVERYTHING. EVEN THE THINGS IT HASN'T CONSIDERED *ESPECIALLY* THOSE THINGS, IN FACT

WHAT THE?!

THAT'S... WHAT DID HE.. WHERE'S...

OR, OR THERE'S THAT

CAN'T GASP BREATHE..

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IS IT ALREADY ARTS AND CRAFTS DAY?

FAR FROM IT. OR, MORE ACCURATELY, YES. BUT THIS IS UNRELATED

IT'S ELECTION NIGHT AND THIS IS WHAT I LIKE TO CALL THE BIG BOARD

IT'S A MAP OF CORNERIA CASTLE.

RED IS FOR KICK ASS KING STEVE AND BLUE IS FOR THE DISTINGUISHED COMPETE-TION. GRAY IS FOR THE SWING ROOMS WHERE THE VOTE IS TOO CLOSE TO CA...

SIR?

FIRST OF ALL, IT'S MID-AFTERNOON AND, AS WE'VE DISCUSSED, YOU ARE KING AND THIS IS A KING-*DOM*.

ELECTIONS ARE THE FEVERED DREAM OF A MADMAN.

ARE THEY, GARY? THEN EXPLAIN THESE EXIT POLLS.

THIS...

THIS IS LAST WEEK'S CAFETERIA MENU, SIR.

THE MAC'N'CHEESE LOBBY WILL BE A SIG-NIFICANT PLAYER IN THE FINAL OUT-COME.

IF I MAY ASK WHO EXACTLY ARE YOU RUNNING AGAINST?

THIS LENGTH OF STRING.

I'M AFRAID HE'S GOT A LOCK ON THE SPAGHETTI VOTE.

THEY NEVER SUPPORT THE VERTEBRATE CANDIDATE.

YOU'RE QUITE MAD, SIR.

NO, I DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY. IT'S JUST POLITICS. AND LENGTH OF STRING IS A *VERY* ROUSING SPEAKER.

MAY I BE EXCUSED TO WEEP FOR OUR NATION?

DON'T BE LONG. THE SARA'S ROOM RE-COUNT IS DUE ANY MOMENT

MEANWHILE IN ANOTHER HELL...

SO KARY HOW'S THINGS?

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EVERYONE THINKS BEING A HERO IS GREAT BUT THEY NEVER TELL YOU ABOUT ALL THE CLEAN UP INVOLVED WHEN YOU'RE DONE.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

WE USUALLY JUST RAZE EVERYTHING TO THE GROUND AND RUN AWAY BEFORE THE AUTHORITIES CAN PEG IT ON US.

YEAH, BUT WE'RE DOING THE CLEAN UP NOW AND IT'S GROSS AND BORING.

UNLESS YOU *ENJOY* PEELING BLACK RELT PARTS OFF OF SCORCHED ROCKS.

HAS IT OCCURRED TO ANYONE ELSE THAT THIS HIDEOUT, WHICH IS BOTH DANGEROUS AND THEMATICALLY APPROPRIATE FOR THE VILLAIN WHO DWELLED WITHIN IT, IS INCREDIBLY UNSTABLE?

PERHAPS SIGNIFICANTLY MORESO NOW THAT THE VILLAIN IS THWARTED?

EXPLAIN.

EXAMPLE: MAGNETO AND HIS ORBITAL CITY-BASE KNOWN AS ASTEROID M.

IT'S HELD TOGETHER BY HIS WILL, SO EVERY TIME HE'S DEFEATED IT CRASHES INTO THE EARTH AND IRONICALLY DESTROYS GENOSHA OR SOMETHING.

MAGNETISM IS BLUE

OH *PLEASE*

WHAT'RE THE ODDS THAT A HIGHLY VOLATILE VOLCANO WOULD BE SOMEHOW "CONTROLLED" BY A DEMON OF FLAMES?

BESIDES, I DON'T THINK KARY'S BRAIN HAD THE CAPACITY TO ENFORCE STABILITY ON *ANY*THING.

YOU MIGHT THINK THESE EVENTS PROVE ME WRONG, BUT I'M WILLING TO BE BRAVE ENOUGH TO CHALK THEM UP TO COINCIDENCE.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

PAYING OUR RESPECTS.

DO YOU HAVE TO PUT IT LIKE THAT?

I JUST LOST A FORTUNE OF MYTHICAL SCOPE I'M IN MOURNING.

WELL, LOOK, HOW LONG IS THIS GOING TO TAKE?

I MEAN, REALLY, DID ANY OF US EVEN *LIKE* HIM?

HIS PERSONALITY WAS A TOTAL RIP OFF OF FIGHTER'S.

OH, LAMENTATIONS! THE WORLD IS SHEATHED IN A DARKNESS LIKE NO OTHER, FOR THE LIGHT, OUR BLACK BELT, IS NO MORE!

OH LIKE *HE* COUNTS.

WE'RE WASTING OUR TIME.

THERE WASN'T ENOUGH BLACK BELT LEFT TO BURY AFTER KARY FINISHED WITH HIM AND IT'S NOT LIKE THE VOLCANO EXPLODING HELPED ANY

IT'S SYMBOLIC, BM.

YEAH, SYMBOLIC OF WHITE MAGE'S INABILITY TO DO HER JOB, IF YOU KNOW WHAT I'M SAYIN'

SHE PROBABLY DOES BLAME HERSELF AND THIS WILL HELP HER COPE

WHERE'S THE HARM?

WOW, I WISH I COULD SUCKER FOUR MORONS INTO PATTING MY BACK AND TELL ME I'M PRETTY EVERY TIME I SCREW UP BIG.

I HEARD EVERY ONE OF YOUR HATE FILLED WORDS.

EVEN SO, I AM CONFIDENT THAT THERE IS A GLIMMER OF GOODNESS IN THE SOUL OF EVERY BEING, EVEN YOU.

I HAVE SET UP THIS MAKESHIFT SHRINE SO THAT WE MAY HONOR THE MEMORY OF OUR FRIEND AND COMRADE WHO DIED SO THAT WE MAY LIVE AND FULFILL OUR DESTINIES.

THAT'S COOL, THAT'S COOL.

WE'VE ALL GOT TO DEAL WITH THE GRIEF OF YOUR FAILURE IN OUR OWN WAYS.

AND I THINK THE BEST WAY *YOU* CAN DEAL WITH IT IS TO HAVE SEX WITH ME

IN THE BUTT

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HEY WHAT'S BLACK AND WHITE AND RED ALL OVER?

I DON'T KNOW.

BLACK BELT, 'CAUSE HE'S DEAD!

THAT DOESN'T REALLY

WHEN IS A VOLCANO FULLY DRESSED?

I DON'T--

WHEN IT'S WEARING BLACK BELT!

THESE AREN'T VERY FUNNY.

WHEN IS A DRIVEWAY NOT A DRIVE-WAY?

...

BLACK BELT'S DEAD!

I MEAN REALLY

IGNORING THE GROSS DISPLAY OF INSENSITIVITY THESE REMARKS REPRESENT AND LOOKING AT THEM FROM A STRICTLY STRUCTURALIST PERSPECTIVE, THEY JUST AREN'T FUNNY

HOW MANY BLACK BELTS DOES IT TAKE TO SCREW IN A LIGHT BULB?

...

HE'S DEAD!

NON-SEQUITURS ARE NOT AUTOMATICALLY HILARIOUS, YOU KNOW

BUT LIFE *IS* FUNNY AND SINCE DEATH IS AN INHERENT PART OF LIFE, IT IS INTRINSICALLY FUNNY WHEN PEOPLE DROP DEAD

DEATH IS NOT "FUNNY", YOU MISERABLE LITTLE *PUKESTAIN* OF A WORM!

IF I HEAR SO MUCH AS AN UTTERANCE ON THE SUBJECT OF BLACK BELT, I WILL PERSONALLY ENSURE THAT YOUR LIFE WILL BE A SERIES OF WRETCHED EVENTS THAT MARCH YOU INTO AN EARLY (AND SHALLOW) GRAVE.

MAN, SHE MUST LIKE ME A *LOT*!

YOU HAVE *HEARD* OF NEGATIVE ATTENTION, RIGHT?

ATTENTION IS ATTENTION, WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE? AM I RIGHT?

HIGH-FIVE!

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ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS MAKE OUR WAY OUT OF THESE CRAZY WOODS...

...GET BACK TO SARDA...

...AND SHOW OFF THE FIRE ORB..

YOU

STEP ONE THEN IS TO GET US OUT OF THESE CREEPY WOODS.

AGREED I NOMINATE MYSELF AS OUR GUIDE

NATURALLY, ACCORDING TO CHAPTER SEVEN OF THE LIGHT WARRIOR CHARTER, IT WILL BE BLACK MAGE'S FAULT SHOULD I FAIL.

WAIT, HOW DOES THAT WORK OUT?

WELL, CHAPTER FIVE DETAILS HOW THIEF, THAT'S ME, CAN DO NO WRONG

IT'S PART OF THE ELF CLAUSE OF SUPERIORITY CHAPTER SEVEN WAS ADDED TO MANUFACTURE ACCOUNTABILITY

WHEN DID THIS HAPPEN?

SOME-ONE HASN'T BEEN KEEPING UP WITH HIS CHARTER

HE NEVER ATTENDS THE COUNCIL MEETINGS.

COUNCIL MEETINGS?!

WELL IT'S NOT LIKE YOU CAN JUST MAKE UP A CHARTER.

WITHOUT THE CONSENT OF THE PEOPLE, NO SYSTEM OF LAW IS VALID.

SO TRUE, RED MAGE.

MANY CLAUSES PASS BY A UNANIMOUS VOTE OF "NOT IT" BY MEMBERS IN ATTENDENCE.

ALL AMENDMENTS MUST BE RATIFIED BY A MAJORITY VOTE

THIS IS THE FIRST I'VE HEARD ABOUT IT!

IT'S YOUR FAULT FOR NOT TAKING A GREATER INTEREST IN LOCAL POLICY

EVEN IF IT IS DONE COMPLETELY IN SECRET

I HEARD THAT!

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THREE MOMENTS FROM AN AVERAGE DAY IN THE HORRIBLE LIFE OF GORDON FREEMAN

Thanks to everyone at Valve.
Images by Anry Nema (unless I hear otherwise)
Abortions of wit, as always, by Brian Clevinger.

THREE DAYS LATER

MAN, WHAT AN ADVENTURE.

I CAN'T BELIEVE WE SOLVED THE MYSTERY OF CRYSTAL LAKE.

I WOULD'VE GOTTEN AWAY WITH IT TOO IF IT WEREN'T FOR ENCYCLOPEDIA FIGHTER AND YOU DARN LIGHT WARRIOR KIDS!

THAT'S **NOT** HOW IT HAPPENED

CURSE YOUR GENIUS, RED MAGE!

ONLY YOU, A FELLOW LEVEL 9 INTELLIGENCE.

...COULD UNRAVEL MY INTRICATE PLOT TO USE CHAOS THEORY FOR WORLD DOMINATION BY SUBTLY MANIPULATING SEEMINGLY UNRELATED, INSIGNIFICANT, AND INDIRECT EVENTS.

OR, EVEN BETTER, THERE'S THE **NON**-FICTION VERSION.

HEY, MY WALLET'S MISSING! THAT'S WHERE I KEEP ALL MY EVIDENCE AND ILL-GOTTEN RICHES!

WHAT CRAP ARE YOU GUYS TALKING ABOUT?

I CAN'T WAIT TO GET BACK TO MY SUPPORTIVE AND LOVING FOSTER FAMILY

I'M SO LUCKY TO HAVE FOUND THEM AFTER BEING DRIVEN INSANE BY THE VERY FACE OF MADNESS ITSELF

AND THEN HAVING MY REAL FAMILY BUTCHERED IN THE NIGHT

LOOK, MISTAKES WERE MADE.

BUT, HEY, YOU'VE ONLY GOT ONE FAMILY TO LOSE.

WHAT, YOU GUYS DON'T REMEMBER THAT AT ALL?

ER...

THINK FAST, BM.

OH, THAT'S RIGHT, I MUST BE MAKING IT UP WITH MY CRAZINESS.

YEAH. LET'S MOVE ON AND FORGET ABOUT WHAT I SAID

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CUTTING THROUGH THE DREAMS OF CLOUDS WITH A BLADE OF FLIGHT ...

YOU CAN'T WIN, THIEF

I'VE FOUGHT THIS BATTLE A MILLION TIMES IN MY HEAD

AND I'VE *HEARD* THIS A MILLION TIMES.

I KNOW THE COUNTERS TO ALL YOUR MOVES BEFORE YOU'VE HAD A CHANCE TO BLINK

WE'RE PLAYING CHECKERS.

I'VE MAPPED OUT EVERY CONTINGENCY AND PROJECTED IT IN MY OWN CONSCIOUSNESS AS AN INFINITE FRACTAL SNOWFLAKE OF TACTICAL INEVITABILITIES.

I CALL IT THE *FRACTATICAL*.

YOU HAVE ONE PIECE LEFT, MAN.

YES, IT'S WHAT WE FRACTATICAL GENIUSES CALL "LULLING YOU INTO A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY."

WE'VE ONLY PLAYED FOR THREE TURNS.

ALL PART OF THE PLAN.

AND, I HAVE MORE PIECES ON MY SIDE NOW THAN WERE INCLUDED IN THE BOX.

I AM AWARE

AND IT'S MY TURN.

DO YOUR BEST BUT I WARN YOU, IT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH. I'VE--

RIGHT, RIGHT, A MILLION TIMES, I GET IT

THERE, I JUMPED YOUR LAST GUY I WIN.

HA! LITTLE DO YOU KNOW THAT I REPAINTED ALL THE RED PIECES BLACK AND THE BLACK PIECES RED

YOU, THE BLACK PLAYER, JUST DESTROYED THE FINAL BLACK PIECE.

I PLAYED YOU LIKE A FOOL THIS WHOLE TIME HAHA!

ONLY, SINCE THE PIECE IS, Y'KNOW, RED, IT'S *RED*. YOU'RE THE RED PLAYER, YOU LOST

RED'S ON THE WHAT NOW?

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until the handle breaks off and you have to find a doctor to pull it out again.

Chapter CDXVIII - Gladius Catena

'When first I witnessed the so-called "Chained Swords", my heart sank for the mission before me. Surely no force of man or magic could withstand such might--I had seen storms with less fury! Still, as per my work, I have chronicled its mysteries here.

Gladius Catena Mastery

Prereqs: 12 Schools of Zodiac Kenshido, Ambidexterity, and Two-Weapon Fighting

Benefits: Gain the 'Whirlwind Attack' Feat when using the "Chained Swords" as well as Cleave (or upgrade to Greater Cleave if Cleave is already possessed). Anyone attempting to back attack or flank the Gladius Catena Master will automatically fail and be victim to a free Attack of Opportunity.

my horse, I wouldn't have spent that year in college

Chapter CCCLXIX - Frigus IX

Know now, faithful reader, that the spell contained herein is not to be undertaken lightly. Its use guarantees nothing short of the end of all the world; doomed forever to a prison of ice. That said, it is best used against foes in other planes or rival dimensions.

Frigus IX

School: Evocation
Components: Total disregard for life and/or morals.
Range: Not Applicable
Targets: The Universe
Duration: Eternity
Saving Throw: Ref save for Wish
Spell Resistance: Not a Chance
Description: Halt all thermodynamic activity of a target resulting in a chain reaction that robs the universe of all energy and kills everything, caster included.

then they made me their chief.

Chapter LXXXI -
"Unda Pugneus

Of all that I have faced in my travels across this great world, it is the "unda pugneus" that I fear most. It is fueled by

HEY, BM, WHAT MAKES YOUR HADOKEN WORK, ANYWAY?

PROMISE NOT TO TELL ANYONE?

FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS CONVERSATION, YES, I DO.

LOVE.

LOVE.

LOVE IS A VERY POWERFUL FORCE. EVEN MORE SO WHEN IT'S FOCUSED INTO A COHERENT BEAM OF DESTRUCTION. EVERY TIME I CAST HADOKEN, IT SIPHONS AWAY SOME OF THE LOVE IN THE UNIVERSE. I'M NOT SURE HOW MUCH, BUT I'M GIVEN TO UNDERSTAND THE DIVORCE RATE GOES UP WITH EACH BLAST.

WHAT!

their chief

I -

ave faced in my
this great world, it is
the "unda pugneus" that I fear most
It is fueled by. You know what?
Screw it. Some things are just too
horrible

Unda Pugneus
School: Evocation
Components: A heart of purest evil
Range: Several million miles.
Targets: One object or creature
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving throw: Fort save for half
Spell Resistance: None
Description: A beam of energy th
does 10d10 x 10
caster in damage
(B
hit, damage

WHITE MAGE, I'M GLAD I FOUND YOU ALONE.

OH. I'M *SURE* I'M IN THE MOOD FOR THIS.

SEE, I WAS THINKING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO BLACK BELT AND HOW IT WAS BASICA...Y YOUR FAULT AND, WE..., LET ME SHOW YOU—

JUST STOP. I DO NOT NEED TO EMBARK ON SOME DEPRAVED JOURNEY OF THE GROTESQUE FEATURING YOU, SANS ROBES, MAKING A MOCKERY OUT OF MY SELF RESPECT

LET ME ASSURE YOU, YOUR ATTENTIONS DISGUST ME.

YOUR URGES REPULSE ME.

THAT A ***THING*** SUCH AS YOURSELF IS ALLOWED TO LIVE WHILE SOMEONE AS SELF-LESS AND ***NOBLE*** AS BLACK BELT IS DEAD HAS GIVEN ME SERIOUS REASON TO DOUBT EVERYTHING I'VE EVER BELIEVED TO BE TRUE AND RIGHT

AND, SORRY TO BURST YOUR *PERVERT* BUBBLE ON THIS ONE, SCORING WITH YOU ON THE SPIRITUAL RE-BOUND IS NOT THE "CURE FOR WHAT AILS ME" OR WHATEVER DEGENERATE LITTLE EUPHEM-ISM YOU'RE GOING TO USE

SO JUST LEAVE ME ALONE, YOU MISERABLE LITTLE MAN.

BAH!

--THIS.

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DUM DE DUM.

WAH!

OH, GRAVITY, MY NEMESIS. ONE DAY I'LL, HEY, A NOTE

IT APPEARS TO BE WRITTEN IN AN ALIEN LANG-UAGE.

Dear White Mage,

As I'm sure you're aware by this time, I'm not very good at talking with you. I probably said something stupid to you in the time it took to hand you this note. Anyway, I figured it would be best if I put my thoughts on paper so they wouldn't get all jumbled up with stupidness when I open my mouth.

Mostly I just wanted to say I'm sorry for any grief I may have caused you. I kind of can't help the things I say. Half of them don't even mean anything, but I have to say them anyway. And the things I want to say get shoved in the corner and going stabbed.

And what I keep trying to say is that none of this was your fault. You could not have known what would happen. And, who knows, maybe it.

Just because some thing hurts doesn't mean it's not supposed to be that way.

That's kinda like us really. It hurts me to see you all the time, but I can get used to the idea that you don't want to be with me. I can't blame you feeling that way.

Black Mage

FLIP!

HM, IT SAYS "WHITE MAGE" ON THE OTHER SIDE, EH?

MAYBE IT'S SOME CRAZY SPELL WRITTEN IN THE SECRETLY CRAZY LANGUAGE OF CRAZICA, THE CRAZIEST NATION OF THE NORTH INSANIAN CON-TINENT

..CAN'T **BELIEVE** HE WAS ACTUALLY GOING TO EXPOSE HIM-SELF--

FOR-SOOTH, YON MAGE OF WHITE ROBES, PRITHEE, THIS LETTER IS THOU'S.

I WOULD ASK WHY YOU'RE DOWN THERE AND WHY YOU ARE TALKING LIKE THAT, BUT I BET YOU DON'T KNOW EITHER, RIGHT?

IF I HAD A REASON FOR EVERYTHING I DID, I'D BE CRAZY.

YES, FAIR ENOUGH.

HM, "DEAR WHITE MAGE.."

OH DEAR

WHAT HAVE I DONE!

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HI, BLACK MAGE?

I, WELL, I FOUND YOUR NOTE

YOU DID?

OKAY, I CAN ONLY ASSUME YOU'RE UPSET, SINCE THIS SITUATION CAME ABOUT AS THE RESULT OF ONE OF MY ACTIONS.

THEREFORE, I SUBMIT THAT THE HEARTFELT NOTE WAS, IN FACT, ALL LIES AND CHICANERY

I LIKED YOUR NOTE.

AH-HA! WHAT I JUST SAID? THAT WAS MY CRAZY JOKEY STYLE OF LIES AND CHICANERY LIKE WE WERE TALKING ABOUT

OH, WILL THE FUN EVER STOP?

SO SAYING STUPID THINGS REALLY IS A PATHOLOGICAL THING FOR YOU.

THE PROOF IS IN THE PUD-DING!

WHY DOES THAT SOUND SEXY WHEN I SAY IT AT YOU?

I THINK YOU'RE ON TO--WAIT, WHAT'S THAT NOISE?

SPUTTER

MALFUNCTION

OH, WE'RE FALLING OUT OF THE SKY AT AN INCREDIBLE RATE.

PAW THIS BUCKET OF BOLTS!

THERE'S NOT A SINGLE BOLT IN ITS FRAME. THIS IS MORE ONE OF YOUR "CHEWING GUM AND PRAYER" FLYING SHIPS.

I THOUGHT THIS THING WAS FIXED!

WE FORTIFIED IT WITH THE PRAYER!

WHAT MORE DO YOU WANT!

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OKAY.

AT OUR CURRENT RATE OF ACCELERATION, THERE'S *JUST* ENOUGH TIME FOR ME TO FORMULATE AND SINGLE-HANDEDLY EXECUTE A BRILLIANT PLAN.

IT WILL BE GUARANTEED TO SAVE US ALL THROUGH THE USE OF READILY AVAILABLE ITEMS AND I'LL FINISH IT BY THE TIME I COMPLETE THIS SEN--

THERE'S NO TIME! WE NEED ACTION *NOW!*

I WAS ONE SYLLABLE AWAY

THIS INTERJECTION IS TAKING *ENTIRELY* LONGER

I'D BE DONE BY NOW.

NO TIME!

SOME- THING HAS TO BE DONE-- *FAST!*

AND SINCE *TALKY MCNOPLAN* HERE WON'T SHUT HIS YAP, *I'LL* HAVE MAKE IT HAPPEN.

MY PLAN *IS* FIN-ISHED

I CONTINUE SPEAKING TO ANSWER THE RIDICULOUS CLAIMS YOU MAKE WHEN YOU INTERRU--

OUR COURSE OF ACTION IS CLEAR

[illegible] HAVE TO HADOKEN THE GROUND BIG TIME.

THE EXPLOSION WILL CUSHION OUR DESCENT AND SAVE OUR LIVES IN WAYS *PROFESSOR VON BLATHER* BACK THERE COULDN'T DREAM OF.

[illegible] ARE NOT EXACTLY KNOWN FOR THEIR LIFE SAVING PROPERTIES.

MAYBE WE SHOULD LISTEN TO RED MAGE THIS TIME...

FINALLY, A VOICE OF REASON.

FIRST WE'LL--OH, NO.

IT IS TOO LATE NOW.

SEE?!

WORDS ARE TREACHEROUS AND FUELED BY LIES! THEY SEEK OUR DES-TRUCTION, FOR THAT IS THEIR LIBERA-TION!

TO ACTION!

BLACK MAGE?

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ONE HESITANT HADOKEN LATER...

YOU DID IT, BLACK MAGE!

SO, YOU STILL DON'T HATE ME?

YOU SAVED OUR LIVES. WHY WOULD I HATE YOU FOR THAT?

OH, WELL, MY HADOKEN SIPHONS LOVE STRAIGHT OUT OF THE UNIVERSE AND TWISTS IT TO HIGHLY DESTRUCTIVE ENDS.

WAIT IT DOES WHAT?

IT TAKES THE HAPPINESS OF OTHERS AND TURNS IT INTO PAIN AND EXPLOSIONS. IT'S WIN-WIN.

HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN THIS WAY?

ALWAYS.

YOU'VE KNOWN THIS ALL ALONG?

WELL, YEAH. I DIDN'T SACRIFICE NINE ORPHANED KIDS FOR FUN.

NOT JUST FOR FUN.

SACRIFICED...?

I NEEDED THEIR SOULS TO SEAL A PACT WITH SOME ANCIENT GOD SO I COULD GET THE HADOKEN.

THERE WAS A CONTRACT, SOME LOOPHOLES, LOTS OF LAUGHING FROM HIS SIDE OF THE TABLE

FAIRLY STANDARD STUFF

YOU... SACRIFICED... CHILDREN. FOR POWER?

OF COURSE. IF I'D DONE IT FOR NO REASON, I'D BE A SICKO OR SOMETHING.

SO. WE GONNA MAKE OUT OR WHAT?

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STATUS REPORT

THE DEATHTRAP HAS LANDED AS PER ITS PARTICULAR IDIOM.

WHITE MAGE AND BLACK MAGE APPEAR TO HAVE SURVIVED, THEY ARE ON THE OTHER RIDGE OF THE CRATER. COMMANDER THIEF IS ALSO SAFE.

I KNOW THAT IT'S CAP-TAIN THIEF. BY THE WAY. AND F.GHT-ER?

MAN. DID YOU GUYS SEE THAT?

GRAVITY WAS ALL "THIS TIME I'VE GOT YOU," AND I WAS ALL, LIKE, "NO." AND THEN BOOM!

SETTLE DOWN, YOU'RE OVERSTIMULATED RED MAGE, CAN YOU GET HIS JUICE FROM THE WRECKAGE?

DON'T YOU UNDER-STAND?

WITH GRAVITY SLAIN, NOW WE CAN FLY!

HUH.

BUT HE.

YOU CAN'T

LOVE, HATE, CLOUDS.

THUD

WHITE MAGE, BLACK MAGE!

SOME-THING BAD HAS HAPPENED TO PHYSICS.

I'LL NEED YOUR HELP RE-ESTABLISHING ORDER TO THE UNIVERSE AFTER I'M DONE WITH RM'S WALLET

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BLACK MAGE, WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT THINGS.

THAT'S TOTALLY GOING TO RUIN THE MAKE OUT SESSION, BABY

YES, ABOUT THAT ***NOT HAPPEN-ING.***

I'M HEARING YES.

LOOK IT'S REALLY SWEET THAT YOU, I DON'T KNOW, "LIKE" ME.

I MEAN, GROWING UP WITHIN THE WALLS OF THE ORDER OF THE WHITE MAGES, I NEVER.

SEE, SECLUSION IS AN IMPORTANT PART

AND, Y'KNOW, THEY'VE GOT THIS ***THING*** ABOUT PURITY AND ALL.

THIS IS COMING OUT WRONG.

YOU CONFUSE ME, BLACK MAGE. A LOT.

SEXILY?

YOUR NOTE WAS VERY TOUCHING, AND THERE MUST BE A REASON SOME-ONE AS NICE AS FIGHT-ER INSISTS ON BEING YOUR FRIEND

BUT THEN THERE'S THE ***RAMPANT*** MURDER.

DID THIEF JUST SAY SOME-THING?

REGRET NOTHING!

THIEF SAYS LOTS OF THINGS.

YOU WERE SAYING? SOMETHING ABOUT FALLING FOR ME?

THE IMPOSSIBLE IS REAL. LOGIC IS THE ILLU-SION!

G'HEY!

WELL.

I WOULD CHARACTERIZE IT MORE LIKE ***NOT*** FALLING FOR YOU.

YOU ARE WITHOUT MERIT.

AND IT MAKES ME SAD THAT THERE DOESN'T APPEAR TO BE ANYTHING I CAN DO TO CHANGE THAT

WHAT GOOD AM I AS AN AGENT OF HEAL-ING IF I CAN'T HELP THOSE WHO NEED ME MOST?

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WELL THAT WASN'T SO BAD

KINDA FUN, REALLY

CRACK!

LIKE GOING TO THE FAIR FOR FREE

AND WITH NO LINES.

WHEN I'M IN A POSITION TO DESTROY ALL CREATION, DON'T THINK FOR A **SECOND** I'M GOING TO SPARE ANY OF YOU JERKS.

CRUNCH!

ARGH! MY PRECIOUS GENITALS!

WHERE ARE WE— SARDA!

INDEED

MY MULTI-PHASIC SENSES DETECTED YOU'D COMPLETED YOUR ASSIGNED TASK.

SO, USING MY AMAZING AND INFINITE POWERS, I WHISKED YOU TO ME

ALSO, I NOTICED YOU HAD CRASHED LANDED NEAR-BY

BLACK BELT! HE, HE DIED AND IT'S ALL MY FAULT, BUT YOU CAN HELP H.M!

NAW

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WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU WON'T BRING HIM BACK TO LIFE?! YOU CAN DO ANY-THING.

THERE ARE ONLY FOUR OF YOU.

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?!

YOUR RELENTLESSLY LINEAR CONCEPT OF TIME BORES ME.

HEY, WHAT'D YOU DO WITH MY GIRL-FRIEND?

WELL, WE MADE OUT

AT LEAST, WE WERE GONNA

I SUGGESTED IT ANYWAY.

LOOK, I'VE GOT ACCESS TO CHLOROFORM, ANY ONE OF THESE MIGHT HAVE BEEN TRUE

DON'T JUDGE ME!

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WHITE MAGE IS FINE. I TEMPORARILY REPOSITIONED HER QUANTUM STATE TO FALL INSIDE A CONVENIENT POCKET DIMENSION.

ONE FILLED WITH AIR?

PROBABLY SHE SHOULD BE SAFE AS LONG AS SHE DOESN'T DO ANYTHING OR TOUCH ANYTHING.

WHAT A BORING REALITY

NOTHING HERE AT ALL

'CEPT FOR THIS INFINITESIMAL SPECK...

WHY'D YOU BANISH HER?

SHE'S NOT HERE YET

WAIT ...CARRY THE SEVEN...

YEAH.

THAT MAKES NO SENSE.

I BLAME THE LIMITED ABILITY OF YOUR LANGUAGE TO DESCRIBE EXTRA-TEMPORAL PHENOMENA. NOW THEN, YOU HAVE THE FIRE [illegible].

OF COURSE

GOOD WE'LL JUST ADD IT TO THE PILE.

NOW FORK OVER THAT QUEST EXP!

QUEST COMPLETE NOISE!

YEAH, SURE.

THAT'S RIGHT, YEAH. ***THAT'S*** WHAT DADDY WANTS, MMM..

DRAPE YOURSELF IN IT. JUST LIKE ***THAT.***

OH, QUEST. LET ME PLUMB YOUR UTTERMOST DEPTHS.

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SO WE GOT THE STUPID FIRE ORB, NOW GIVE US THE POW-ER YOU PROMIS-ED US.

I CANNOT, FOR THERE IS ANOTHER TASK BEFORE YOU.

TASK? NO, I DON'T THINK SO.

WE RAN YOUR LITTLE ERRAND, TIME TO PAY UP

YOU MUST TRAVEL INTO THE FROZEN BOWELS OF THE EARTH.

HOW MANY BOWELS DOES THIS GODFOR-SAKEN PLANET HAVE?!

FIND THE ANSWER IN MY NEW BOOK, *DR UNNE AT THE ASS END OF THE WORLD AND OTHER ADVEN-TURES.*

DR. UNNE
RENOWNED GEOPROCTOLOGIST

[illegible] NOT DOING IT.

YOU WILL FIND AN ITEM OF GREAT POWER.

WE'RE YOUR GUYS. ACE NUMBER ONE CRYPTO-ARCHEOLOGISTS, THAT'S US.

YOU TOO CAN FIND THE ANCIENT TREASURES THAT DAMNED LONG DEAD CIVIL-IZATIONS BY USING YOUR VERY OWN "ACE-IN-THE-HOLE" METAL DETECT-OR.

Ace
Number One
Crypto-Archeologist

WITHOUT IT, YOUR FATE WILL NOT BE MET

YOU'RE DONE CONVINC-ING US BY THE WAY

MEANWHILE.

I WISH THERE WAS SOME LIGHT

And, behold, first there was the Word— and it was the Light.

NOTHING GOOD CAN COME OF THIS.

YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN.

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IF SARDA'S INFINITELY POWERFUL, THEN WHY DOES HE MAKE *US* DO ALL OF HIS DIRTY WORK?

IT'S NOT ABOUT H.M.

IT'S ABOUT *US*.

YEAH, IT'S ABOUT *US* DOING ALL THE WORK!

NO, HE'S MAKING US WORTHY OF THE POWER HE WILL BESTOW UPON US.

HE SHOULD GIVE US THE POWER AND *THAT'LL* MAKE US WORTHY OF USING IT INDISCRIMINATELY Y'KNOW, LIKE OWNING A GUN.

HOW DOES *THAT* MAKE SENSE? IF I HAVE POWER, I'M WORTHY OF IT EARNING SOMETHING LEGITIMATELY IS A WASTE OF TIME.

I CAN VOUCH FOR THAT

SEE?

OLD *BASTARD'S* GOT IT ALL WRONG.

ARM NRA WITH PRIDE
Buying soyrage,a wine pawn shop for over 100 years

ELSEWHEN...

EXCUSE ME, BUT IS THIS THE BEGINNING OF THE UNIVERSE? I DO HOPE I'M NOT LATE

SARDA!

I'M SORRY, DO I KNOW YOU, M'SS?

YES, DON'T YOU REMEMBER ME?

HM, PERHAPS WE HAVE NOT MET YET

WHAT? OF COURSE WE DID

I WAS THE TOP STUDENT AT THE WHITE MAGE ACADEMY, I GOT ASSIGNED TO PROTECT FATE, YOU'RE THE GREATEST SAGE OF ALL TIME AND ON A SIMILAR MISSION, ETC. AND SO ON.

HUH.

IF THAT IS HOW IT HAPPENS, THEN I CAN SEE I AM LATE

PRESENTLY...

SO NOW I KNOW HOW SHE GOT THERE FIRST *AND* WHAT IT FEELS LIKE WHEN I SCREW WITH SOMEONE'S LIFELONG AMBITIONS.

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TELL ME WHAT DID YOU SAY BEFORE I ARRIVED?

UM, IT WAS DARK SO I SAID SOMETHING ABOUT LIGHT NOW IT'S LIKE THIS INSTEAD

AND THAT IS ALL? YOU'RE CERTAIN OF THIS?

YEAH. SURE. I GUESS. LOOK WHAT IS THIS ALL ABOUT ANYWAY?

AN INFANT UNIVERSE IS AN INFINITE NUMBER OF SIMULTANEOUS OUTCOMES WAITING TO COLLAPSE INTO A SINGLE EXPRESSION.

I HAVE CALCULATED THAT, AS A RESULT, THEY ARE ***HIGHLY*** SUGGESTIBLE

WELL SOMEONE NEEDS TO SUGGEST SOME MATTER.

OOH, ***NEAT*** I BET LIFE IS NEXT

PLEASE STOP TALKING.

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WHERE THE HELL *IS* HE? EVEN FIGHTER GOT BACK WITH HIS SHARE OF THE WORK DONE.

I'M A HELP-ER!

OF COURSE YOU [illegible].

YOU'D THINK EVEN THOUGH RED MAGE IS A FAILURE AT EVERYTHING ELSE IN LIFE, HE COULD AT *LEAST* READ A LIST HE WROTE HIM-SELF

HE WAS VERY EXCITED WHAT COULD BE TAK-ING HIM SO LONG?

MEANWHILE, A SCANT THREE BLOCKS AWAY

HERE'S TEN [EYES OF LEECHES] FOR YOU...

WHICH GETS ME THREE [WORM TAILS] FOR YOU..

IN EXCHANGE FOR THESE THREE [GRISTLETHORN] BERRIES..

THAT YOU NEED FOR YOUR [SPECIAL RECIPE]...

FOR THE DOCK WORKERS TO DRINK SO THEY CAN UNLOAD THE [LATEST SHIP-MENT]..

WHICH INCLUDES [PRAVOKA LETTUCE] SO THAT YOU CAN MAKE SAMMICHES FOR MY FRIENDS AND I

LOOK, BUDDY, I TOLD YOU AN HOUR AGO. WE DON'T ACCEPT NO QUEST ITEMS FOR NO PAYMENT

SIGH.

/BUG

I HAVE FOUND A VENDOR WHO DOES NOT GIVE THE QUEST REWARD UPON QUEST COMP-LETION.

ARE YOU ON THE DOPE, SON?

GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE I CALL THE COPS ON YOU, PUNK

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MEANWHILE, AT THE TEMPLE OF FIENDS.

Bake Sale Saturday

GUYS! I'VE DONE IT!

YE DONE WHAT? THE DISHES? YAR

PER-FECTO! WOW! SUGAR COOKIE RECIPE?

OH, HEAVENS NO.

I'LL HAVE TO TALK TO THE GIRLS DOWN AT THE BAKING CLUB. HELEN HAS AN IDEA. WHILE UNTESTED, HER THEORY SEEMS TO HOLD WITH--

BABBLING!

RIGHT; SORRY. NO; THIS IS *BIGGER* THAN SUGAR COOKIES, IF YOU CAN BELIEVE IT.

I DO BE HEARING "DISHES"

I'VE FOUND OUR FOURTH DARK WARRIOR!

WAS HE DOIN' THE DISHES?

ANYWAY, THIS GUYS GLOOMY, STINGING WORDS RANG TRUE TO ME. IT'S THE KIND OF EVIL THAT OUGHT TO INFUSE THIS ORGANIZATION.

I WAS AT MY POETRY JAM--

YOU WERE AT YOUR WHAT?

AT MY FAVORITE COFFEE SHOP, THE DAILY GRIND.

THANK YOU FOR PUNISHING MY CURIOSITY.

AND SO I GIVE YOU VILBERT!

I'LL NEED THE PHONE NUMBER HERE SO MY MOM KNOWS WHERE I AM.

IF THE DISHES ARE TO BE DONE THEY'LL BE DONE BY ME THEN?

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SO WHAT ARE OUR MALICIOUS PLANS TO EXACT VENGEANCE AGAINST THE LIGHT WARRIORS WHO RUINED OUR LIVES?

YOU'D HAVE TO ASK OUR GLORIOUS LEADER, KID. . .

SEEMS TO ME GARLAND'S PLAN CONSISTS ENTIRELY OF SITTING AROUND THE HOUSE INEFFECTUALLY.

WE'RE LULLING THEM INTO A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY, DRIZZT.

WHERE DID I PUT THE SUGAR?

YES. THAT'S THEIR SIGNATURE. THEY MURDERED MY FATHER IN COLD BLOOD TOO.

I THINK THEY'RE CONNECTED TO THE FOREST ELF MAFIA.

AH.

I DON'T HAVE PROOF SO MUCH AS WILD CONJECTURE AND FURIOUS PARANOIA.

BUT THAT'S JUST WHAT THEY WANT ME TO THINK.

WELL, I'D LIKE TO GET A CRACK AT THEM. THEY TOTALLY RUINED MY LARP GAME

NO ONE SCREWS WITH TONY CAPETTIMOON-RAVENWINDSONG-FIRE.

OH, AND KILLED MY DAD, I GUESS. BUT HE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND ME

YAR, THEM LIGHTED WARRIORS STOLE ME SHIP AND SANK HER

I THOUGHT YOU GAVE THEM YOUR SHIP BECAUSE YOU'RE SUCH AN AWFUL SEA CAPTAIN THAT IT WAS GOING TO SINK OF ITS OWN ACCORD ANYWAY.

I'M NOT GOOD AT WHAT IT IS WHAT I DO.

YAR.

LIKE TALKING!!

IF MR BIKKE IS A SEA CAPTAIN I MIGHT HAVE AN IDEA...

HEY GUYS, YOU'LL NEVER GUESS WHAT I CHARTERED FOR US!

WHICH ONE OF YOU BRAIN SURGEONS DECIDED FIGHTER SHOULD GET OUR BOAT?

TEN MINUTES EARLIER.

DO YOU EVER SHUT UP?! YOU SMELL LIKE WET UGLY ON A BAD DAY!

GET OUT OF HERE. FIND A BOAT OR SOMETHING.

'KAY!

IT'S THE GREATEST BOAT EVARZ!

I JUST BET IT IS.

RUST HOLES PROVIDE BETTER VENTILATION SO THE WATER IT TAKES ON DOESN'T STAY INSIDE

IT'S THAT BOAT OVER THERE. THE INCREDIBLY MAJESTIC ONE WITH ALL THE SHEETS.

GOLLY

GOOD WORK

I ASSUME YOU'VE GOT A CREW TO SAIL THE DARN THING.

AYE, THAT HE DO BE HAVING. YAR.

HAVING THAT DO HE INDEED, DOES HAVE.

FOR- SOOTH, YEA, UNTO HE DOES THOU.

MUMBLE

ELBOW SHOVE

YAR.

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YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS ABOUT GOING WITH THEM.

WHY NOT?

WE NEED TO TRAVEL AROUND THE WORLD AND THEY'VE GOT A SHIP

I'M JUST AN AVERAGE FOREST ELF WITH NO REAL KNOWLEDGE OF SEA TRAVEL, BUT I KNOW THAT'S ONE BIG BOAT AND IT'S GOT A TON OF BLANKETS.

THE TECHNICAL NAME BE "SHEETS"

PRITHEE, OH CAPTAIN MY CAPTAIN, BUT AREN'T THEY HITHERTO "SAILS"

LOOK 'ERE, SONNY JIM.

I'VE SUNK MORE BOATS THAN THE FABLED GNOMATIC SINKING MACHINE WHAT IS NUTHIN' MORE THAN A LARGE STONE WITH MANY SMALLER STONES ATTACHED AS WELL AS A LIBERAL APPLICATION OF FIRE

I DO BE THINKING I KNOWS WHAT SAILS BE

YOU MEAN "SHEETS"

GENTLEMEN, GENTLEMEN.

YE MUTINOUS DOG.

ER, THAT IS, HEY, YE GUYS, KEEL HAUL YE ARGUMENTING. UH, YAR.

THESE ARE THE DARK WARRIORS.

TELL ME YOU KNOW THAT YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE I CAN TALK TO AS SOMETHING LIKE AN EQUAL. DON'T TAKE THAT FROM ME

OH, BLACK MAGE. YOU AND YOUR PARANOID DELUSIONS.

"THESE ARE DARK WARRIORS." "WHITE MAGE LIKES ME" "THIEF IS TRYING TO ROB US OF OUR VERY SOULS."

WAIT, I ONLY ***THINK*** THAT LAST ONE OUT OF FEAR OF YOU. I'VE NEVER ***SAID*** IT OUT LOUD

OH, I STEAL SOULS AND SECRETS.

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OKAY, THEY'RE ALL IN THE MESS HALL EATING UP A DELICIOUS HOME-MADE MEAL. WE ARE FREE TO PLOT WITHOUT INTERRUPTIONS.

NOT THAT I ENDORSE THIS PLAN, WHETHER WHOLE OR IN PART, BUT WHAT IS UP WITH VILBERT'S PIRATE LINGO?

I'M PLAYING A ROYAL NOBLE WHO, WANDERING ALONE ONE DARK AND VICTORIAN NIGHT, STUMBLED INTO THE WRONG ALLEY AFTER SOME BACCHANAL PARTY AS IS THE WONT OF NOBLES. HE STRUGGLED BUT NAY-- WHEREUPON HE WAS BESET BY A CREATURE OF THE NIGHT!

LESS FRUITY INSULGENCE, MORE FACTS.

WAS EMBRACED(TM), BECAME A VAMPIRE AND THEN FORCED INTO A LIFE OF PIRACY

Y'KNOW, THAT BRINGS UP ANOTHER POINT. WHY ARE WE TALKING LIKE PIRATES? AREN'T WE SUPPOSED TO BE THE CREW OF A MERCHANT SHIP?

YAR, WHEN WE BE ON THE HIGH SEAS, WE'LL BE BOWING TO MY EXPERTISE.

DELIGHTFUL COUPLET, MR. BURKE.

WHEN WE BE FIGHTING LIGHT WARRIORS IN OUR CAVE STRONGHOLD AND YET BE MANAGING TO LOSE TO THEM, THEN WE BE ASKING YE HOW WE SHOULD TALK.

SO THAT'S HOW IT'S GOING TO BE, IS IT.

LET'S NOT BICKER, GENTLEMEN. REMEMBER, YOU CAN'T HUG WITH MEDIEVAL ARMS.

WELL, THIS IS ALL MOOT, ISN'T IT? IF THEY'RE EATING FROM THE FOODSTUFFS WE BROUGHT ABOARD, THEN THEY'LL BE DEAD IN A FEW AGONIZING HOURS

OH, GOSH NO. THAT FOOD WENT BAD, I THREW IT OUT AND PICKED UP ALL NEW SUPPLIES.

IT WAS POISONED

WHY DO YOU THINK I GOT RID OF IT?

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WELL, THE POORLY DISGUISED DARK WARRIORS DIDN'T KILL US IN OUR SLEEP

AT LEAST WE'RE ONE DAY CLOSER TO WHEREVER THE HELL IT IS WE'RE GOING.

YAR, THAT LARP-LUBBIN' FRUITCAKE'S PLAN WAS FULL OF RUST HOLES.

OH, SURE, THEY BE GREAT FOR LETTIN' WATER VENTILATE OUT OF YE SINKIN' BOAT, BUT WHAT DO THEY DO FOR YE VICTORY OVER ENEMIES?

NUTHIN'!

GASP AND SURPRISE!

ALTHOUGH, REALLY NOT SO *MUCH* SURPRISE 'CAUSE THEY'RE OBVIOUS

BUT NOW BIKKE BE ON THE CASE, YAR.

THOSE LIGHTED WARRIORS WON'T BE LASTING LONG WHEN I CRASHES US INTO *THAT THERE* ICED-BERG!

GASP AND ALARM!

HADOKEN!

YAR?

TIS NO MATTER, THAR BE MANY AN ICED-BERG IN THESE WATERY WATERS.

COLD

FIRE 3!

FLARE

METEO

YAR, MUST BE EXPLOD-ING TUESDAY THAR BE BUT ONE ICED-BERG LEFT!

CRAP, OUTTA BIG SPELLS.

THIS CALLS FOR SOME FAST TELEPORTY-STABBITY ACTION. I'LL HAVE TO WHITTLE THE BAS-TARD DOWN

BAMF!

ALMOST GOT IT THERE!

TINK TINK TINK TINK TINK TINK TINK

WHY WOULD IT EXPLODE?

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WOW. SADDEN ME WITH YOUR RELENTLESS INCOMPETENCE.

AND HAVE YE BEEN DOIN' TO TAKE CARE OF OUR PROBLEMS?

I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW I'VE GOT STUPID ONE, THE ELFISH ONE, AND THE OTHER STUPID ONE CLEANING OUT THE CANNONS.

I EQUIPPED THEM WITH SLOW BURNING FUSES SO I COULD BE OUT HERE WHEN THEY GET TURNED INTO A FINE MIST OF CHUM AT ABOUT 400M/S.

OH NO! I'VE GOT TO ACT FAST.

WHAT ABOUT THE REALLY SMELLY ONE?

YOU MEAN THE UGLY ONE? WITH THE DOOFY HAT?

ME LOOKS EXCEPTIONALLY INEFFECTUAL. I FIGURED WE COULD PUSH HIM INTO THE WATER OR SOMETHING.

AYE.

BOOM

ODD. THAT'S AT LEAST TWICE AS LOUD AS IT SHOULD'VE BEEN!

HUFF HUFF

YAR. WHAT AN INHUMAN MESS!

SCORE!

HOW DID THEY SURVIVE!

IT'S LIKE SOMEONE STUFFED FAR TOO MUCH POWDER INTO THESE GUNS AND ALL THE EXTRA CONCUSSIVE FORCES CANCELLED EACH OTHER OUT. BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! ON SEVERAL LEVELS.

DAMMIT! I MEAN, "GOOD. I SAVED MY FRIENDS ON PURPOSE."

I THINK IT WAS YE.

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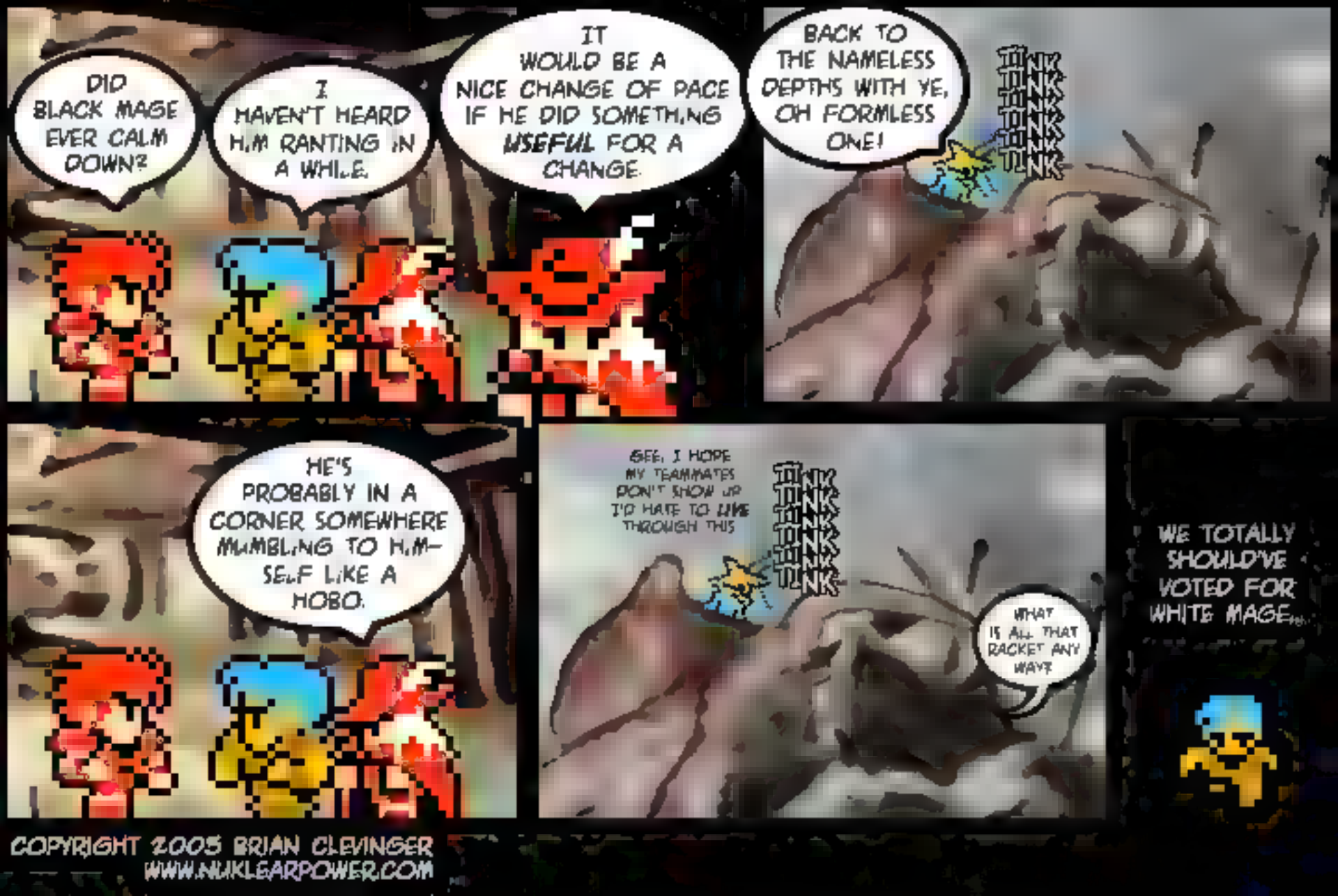
DID BLACK MAGE EVER CALM DOWN?
I HAVEN'T HEARD HIM RANTING IN A WHILE.
IT WOULD BE A NICE CHANGE OF PACE IF HE DID SOMETHING USEFUL FOR A CHANGE.
BACK TO THE NAMELESS DEPTHS WITH YE, OH FORMLESS ONE!
TI NK
HE'S PROBABLY IN A CORNER SOMEWHERE MUMBLING TO HIMSELF LIKE A HOBO.
SEE, I HOPE MY TEAMMATES DON'T SHOW UP I'D HATE TO LIVE THROUGH THIS
WHAT IS ALL THAT RACKET ANY WAY?
WE TOTALLY SHOULD'VE VOTED FOR WHITE MAGE...
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LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT.

TAKE YOUR TIME, PAL.

YOU SUMMONED A DEEP ONE FOR US.

YUP!

AND IT ATTACKED US.

YOU BETCHA!

AND THAT WAS PART OF THE PLAN SOMEHOW?

THE CORNERSTONE OF THE WHOLE SHABANG, I'D SAY.

AND THAT WAS GOING TO KILL THE LIGHT WARRIORS BY DESTROYING OUR BOAT?

SEE HOW SIMPLE THIS IS?

IT'S LIKE YOU HATE LIFE.

WHAT WAS TO STOP IT FROM KILLING US TOO?

OH, YOU'LL LOVE THIS.

SEE, AFTER THE DEEP ONE SWALLOWED THE SHIP OR THE LIGHT WARRIORS OR WHATEVER, I'D THEN SUMMON UP A DINOSAUR.

TO WHAT PURPOSE?

OH, THEY'D FIGHT EACH OTHER, OF COURSE.

GIVING US ENOUGH TIME TO SWIM AWAY, RIGHT?

EXACTLY!

I CAN'T SWIM. BASED ON THE FACT THAT SWIMMING INVOLVES AQUATIC TRAVEL, I CAN ONLY ASSUME BIKKE CAN'T SWIM.

I CAN SINK LIKE A ROCK, IF'N THAT BE COUNTING.

VILBERT?

THE WATER WOULD POSITIVELY *RUIN* MY OUTFIT

AND YOU CAN'T SWIM, GARLAND, AS YOU ARE WEARING A HUNDRED POUNDS OF METAL ARMOR.

YOU DON'T THINK I THOUGHT OF ALL THAT?

I'D SUMMON A MARMOSET. A REALLY BIG ONE.

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FELLOWS, IT HAS COME TO MY ATTENTION THAT WE NEED A DRASTIC CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP.

I DO BE SHARING THAT OPINION.

MY DARK SOUL BURNS WITH FIERY AGREEMENT

OR POSSIBLY TACOS.

WHY ARE YOU EATING? YOU'RE A VAMPIRE.

I LIKE TACOS.

WE'RE GETTING OFF TRACK. OUR ORGANIZATION IS IN DESPERATE NEED OF A NEW DIRECTION.

THE CANDIDATE FOR THAT ROLE IS OBVIOUS TO ALL OF US.

AYE

INDEED

GOOD.

AS OUR NEW LEADER, I'D LIKE...

AS OUR NEW LEADER, I'D LIKE...

AS OUR NEW LEADER, I'D LIKE...

IT SEEMS WE ARE AT AN IMPASSE.

LET'S HELP?

WE COULD MAKE A COMMITTEE OF EVIL.

AYE! WE COULD DETERMINE OUR POSITIONS WITHIN SAID COMMITTEE VIA SOME SORT OF SWIMMING CONTEST YAR.

NO, BIKKE, JUST NO.

I AM THE MAGE. I CAN'T SOLO THESE THINGS!

IF NOT FOR MY SAKE, THEN FOR YOUR OWN SURVIVAL DAMMIT!

FIGHT! FIGHT CURSE YOU!

NOW A POETRY CONTEST ON THE OTHER HAND

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WHAT?

I SAID I THINK THERE'S SOMETHING STRANGE ABOUT THESE SAILORS.

OH, HELLO THERE MR. CONCUSSION. HOW ARE YOU TODAY?

WHAT'S HE MUMBLING ABOUT? DUNNO.

PLEASE SPEAK QUIETLY

I THINK HE'S HUNG OVER.

NO, MY BRAIN IS HEM-ORRHAGING VERY *IMPORTANT* FLUIDS.

Y'KNOW, WHILE YOU'VE BEEN SITTING HERE...

QUIETLY I BEG OF YOU.

...WE'VE BEEN HARD AT WORK FIGURING OUT THESE SAILORS.

THEY'RE NOT SAILORS THEY'RE DARK WARRIORS.

WE THINK THEY MIGHT BE PIRATES.

I HATE YOU.

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I'M SORRY, BLACK MAGE, BUT YOU ARE OBVIOUSLY LYING.

THERE ***WERE*** GIANT MONSTERS! I HAD TO FIGHT THEM MYSELF!

I HAVE THE GAPING, LIFE-THREATENING ***WOUNDS*** TO PROVE IT!

THAT'S RIDICULOUS. EVERYONE KNOWS YOU'RE WEAK AND COWARDLY

YOU'D NEVER FIGHT GIANT MONSTERS ALL ON YOUR OWN.

OKAY, YEAH, THAT'S A GOOD POINT. ***BUT!***

I COULDN'T HELP IT!

WE'RE ON THE OPEN SEAS.

THE ONLY PLACE TO RUN INVOLVES INTRODUCING GALLONS OF SALT WATER INTO MY LUNGS.

MY SURVIVAL INSTINCT KICKED IN! I'M AS SHAMED BY MY APPARENT COURAGE AS THE REST OF YOU.

QUITE UNLIKELY.

I FIND THAT HARD TO BELIEVE.

THEN WHERE'S THE EVIDENCE? IF GIANT MONSTERS HAVE BEEN, AS YOU ALLEGE, SLAIN, IT STANDS TO REASON THEY'D LEAVE BEHIND GIANT BODIES.

MEANWHILE, IN THE LAND OF THE DWARVES.

S.R. THE BEARDED COASTAL RESERVES HAVE REPORTED BETWEEN ZERO AND THREE GIANT MONSTER BODIES WASHED UP ON OUR BEARDS, ER, ***SHORES***.

THAT'S QUITE DISTRESSING

YES, YOUR HIGHNESS.

PERHAPS MOST WORRYING OF ALL IS THAT DWARF LAND IS A LANDLOCKED NATION MADE ENTIRELY OUT OF MOUNTAINS.

WE ARE ***WITHOUT*** "SHORES"

THIS NEWS WILL SIMPLY RUIN THE COASTAL RESERVES.

I'LL SEND THE ORDER TO TERMINATE THEIR SERVICES POST HASTE.

OH, NO TIME FOR THAT, I SHOULD THINK. JUST HAVE THEM MURDERED IN FRONT OF THEIR FAMILIES AND BLAME IT ON THE ELVES.

LESS PAPERWORK THAT WAY

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WE KNOW ONE THING FOR SURE.

THERE'S A MYSTERY ON THIS BOAT AND THOSE SAILORS ARE AT THE HEART OF IT!

THERE IS NO MYSTERY THEY ARE THE DARK WARRIORS. THEY'RE NOT EVEN WEARING THEIR DISGUISES NOW.

HMM.

DON'T WORRY, BLACK MAGE. ENCYCLOPEDIA FIGHTER IS ON THE CASE!

DIDN'T WE USE THAT ONE ONCE ALREADY?

A PAYMENT OF A SINGLE QUARTER IS ALL I REQUIRE

I REFUSE TO INDULGE THIS FANTASY OF YOURS IN ANY WAY

THEN I AM OFF!

UNLESS HIS FANTASY INVOLVES REPEATED SHOVINGS OF A KNIFE INTO HIS PRECIOUS SPINE.

I COULD BE DOWN FOR THAT

THIEF, I NEED A QUARTER SO I CAN TAKE THE CASE.

HOW ABOUT THIS.

I KEEP MY QUARTER AND WHEN YOU GET THIS CASE, I'LL GET 50% OF THE RIGHTS TO IT

BOX!

OH, IF YOU INSIST

HM, I NEED A QUARTER SO I CAN TAKE THE CASE.

FIND YOUR OWN QUARTER, I'M SAVING FOR MY MOUNT

MAN, I'LL *NEVER* GET ON THE CASE AT THIS RATE.

YAR

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I HAVE GATHERED YOU ALL HERE TO DRAMATICALLY REVEAL THE CONCLUSION TO THE MYSTERY OF THE GHOST PIRATES OF THE HAUNTED GALLEON OF PIRATES' COVE

OH, YOU STUPID, STUPID, UGLY MAN.

I'VE HAD MORE DIFFICULT CASES. BUT NOT MANY

I MUST ASSUME THAT YOU HOLD INTELLIGENT DISCOURSE IN THE HIGHEST CONTEMPT, OTHERWISE YOU WOULD NOT ASSAIL AGAINST IT DAILY

ASSAIL AGAINST YOU SURE ABOUT THAT ONE?

IT WAS CARRIED OUT AT SEA.

IT WAS VERY NEARLY THE PERFECT CRIME.

UNDER COVER OF NIGHT.

WITHOUT WITNESSES OR THE SLIGHTEST HINT OF EVIDENCE.

SO PERFECT WAS THE EXECUTION, IN FACT, SOME OF ITS OWN VICTIMS REFUSE TO BELIEVE A CRIME WAS COMMITTED AT ALL!

WHAT CRIME?!

MY POINT PRECISELY

THAT'S IT. I'M OUTTA HERE.

"MY POINT PRECISELY."

GIMME A BREAK.

IF I KNEW HOW TO STEER THIS THING, I'D DRIVE US RIGHT INTO... WAIT A SECOND

WHO IS STEERING THIS THING?

BACK IN 10

-BIKKE

(YAR)

SHIPWRECK!

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WELL, IT'S ABOUT A THOUSAND DEGREES BELOW ZERO, WE HAVE NO SHELTER, FOOD, SUPPLIES OF ANY KIND, OR COMBUSTIBLE MATERIALS THAT AREN'T OUR FLESH.

I PROPOSE WE CUT OPEN SOMEONE'S GUT SO THE REST OF US CAN SLEEP NESTLED WITHIN HIS WARM ENTRAILS.

THE OBVIOUS CHOICE FOR THIS SACRIFICE IS FIGHTER BECAUSE HE IS FILLED WITH MEATS.

IT'S TRUE!

WAIT, I HAVE AN IDEA! I HAVE ICE SPELLS! WE'RE SAVED!

ICE SPELLS.

OKAY, RED MAGE JUST VOLUNTEERED

AWW...

MEANWHILE, AT THE BEGINNING OF TIME

I HAVE TO TELL YOU, FINDING OUT THAT I'M GOD HAS KIND OF CHALLENGED MY RELIGIOUS BELIEFS.

WHY?

WELL, IT'S ALL A LIE

IS IT?

I'M REMINDED OF A SAYING, SOMETHING LIKE, "IF THERE WAS NO GOD, THEN MAN WOULD HAVE TO MAKE HIM" YOU CAN MAKE THERE BE GOD

AND YOU WILL KNOW FOR A FACT THAT IT EXISTS AND IS GOOD

THE QUESTION IS DO YOU HAVE TO MAKE GOD OR...

DO YOU HAVE FAITH THAT YOUR GOD IS A NATURAL PART OF THE COSMOS?

THAT YOUR BEING HERE, YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE WAY OF THINGS, IS PART OF YOUR JOURNEY

I HADN'T THOUGHT OF IT THAT WAY BEFORE.

WELL, I AM A SAGE

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AT LEAST THE DARK WARRIORS PROBABLY DIED IN THE WRECK TOO.

THE WHO?

THE PIRATES

OH, HEY! I NEVER GOT TO REVEAL THE SECRET OF THE MYSTERY OF THE CURSED PIRATES CAVE GALLEON

HAUNTED

YES. TRAGIC. AND SUCH A SHAME IT'S FAR TOO LATE TO START TALKING ABOUT IT N--

THEY WEREN'T PIRATES AT ALL.

OLD MAN WITHERS HAD SET UP A COMPLEX SERIES OF MOVIE PROJECTORS, MIRRORS, SMOKE MACHINES, AND A WEREWOLF TO TRICK US INTO THINKING--

THE ICE IS A FICKLE MISTRESS.

PLUS SHE APPEARS TO BE A KNIFE WIELDING MANIAC.

AREN'T THEY ALL?

AREN'T THEY ALL WHAT?

WOMEN THEY'RE ALL CRAZY.

LOOK AT WHITE MAGE AND HER IRRATIONAL HATRED OF ME

A, I WOULDN'T CALL THAT CRAZY SO MUCH AS EXPECTED AND B) CAN WE TALK ABOUT THIS ***AFTER*** WE'RE DEAD?

I CAN'T THINK OF ***ANY***THING I'D LIKE LESS TO TALK ABOUT IN MY FINAL MOMENTS THAN THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE MATING RITUALS OF YOU ***FILTHY*** NON-ELVES.

FELLOWS!

MY PLAN IS NEARLY COMPLETE. THE FINAL, MOST INTEGRAL STEP IS AT HAND

OUR VERY SURVIVAL NOW ***HINGES*** UPON FIGHTER'S UNIQUE ABILITY TO.. HRM.

OH, MURDEROUS ICE!

WHEN WILL WOMEN-IDENTIFIED PERSONIFICATIONS LEARN NOT TO BE CRAZY?!

THAT'S WHAT ***I'M*** SAYIN'!

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OKAY, LET'S PILE INTO FIGHTER'S GUTS.

NO ONE IS COCOONING HIMSELF IN FIGHTER'S BODY NOT YET

NATURE HAS GIVEN US THIS BOUNTY. IT WOULD BE A CRIME TO LET IT GO TO WASTE.

I THINK NATURE'S WORKING UP A MAGE FLAVORED BOUNTY...

I'M STILL ALIVE I'M ONLY BLEEDING TO DEATH AT THE MOMENT

LOOK AT WHAT YOUR INACTION HAS WROUGHT HE'S ***ALIVE.***

HAD WE ***BLINDLY*** LISTENED TO MY RANTINGS, WE'D HAVE GUTTED HIM BY NOW AND EVERYTHING WOULD BE GREAT AND WARM.

DOESN'T IT OCCUR TO YOU THAT THIS "PLAN" IS INCREDIBLY SHORT SIGHTED?

IN WHAT WAY?

FIGHTER'S ORGANS, AS MEATY AS THEY MAY BE, WON'T OUTLAST THE COLD.

THE WAY I SEE IT, THERE'S ALSO YOU AND RED MAGE.

THAT'LL GIVE ME A COUPLE DAYS TO FIGURE OUT A WAY TO SAVE ALL THE SURVIVORS.

CONSISTING ***ENTIRELY*** OF YOURSELF

THAT CAN'T BE HELPED.

OR WE COULD LISTEN TO OUR VERY OWN TACTICAL GENIUS!

DID YOU HIRE A NEW GUY WITHOUT TELLING ME?

I THINK HE MEANS HIMSELF.

OH.

OH, THAT'S SO SAD

I'M GETTING A HEADACHE...

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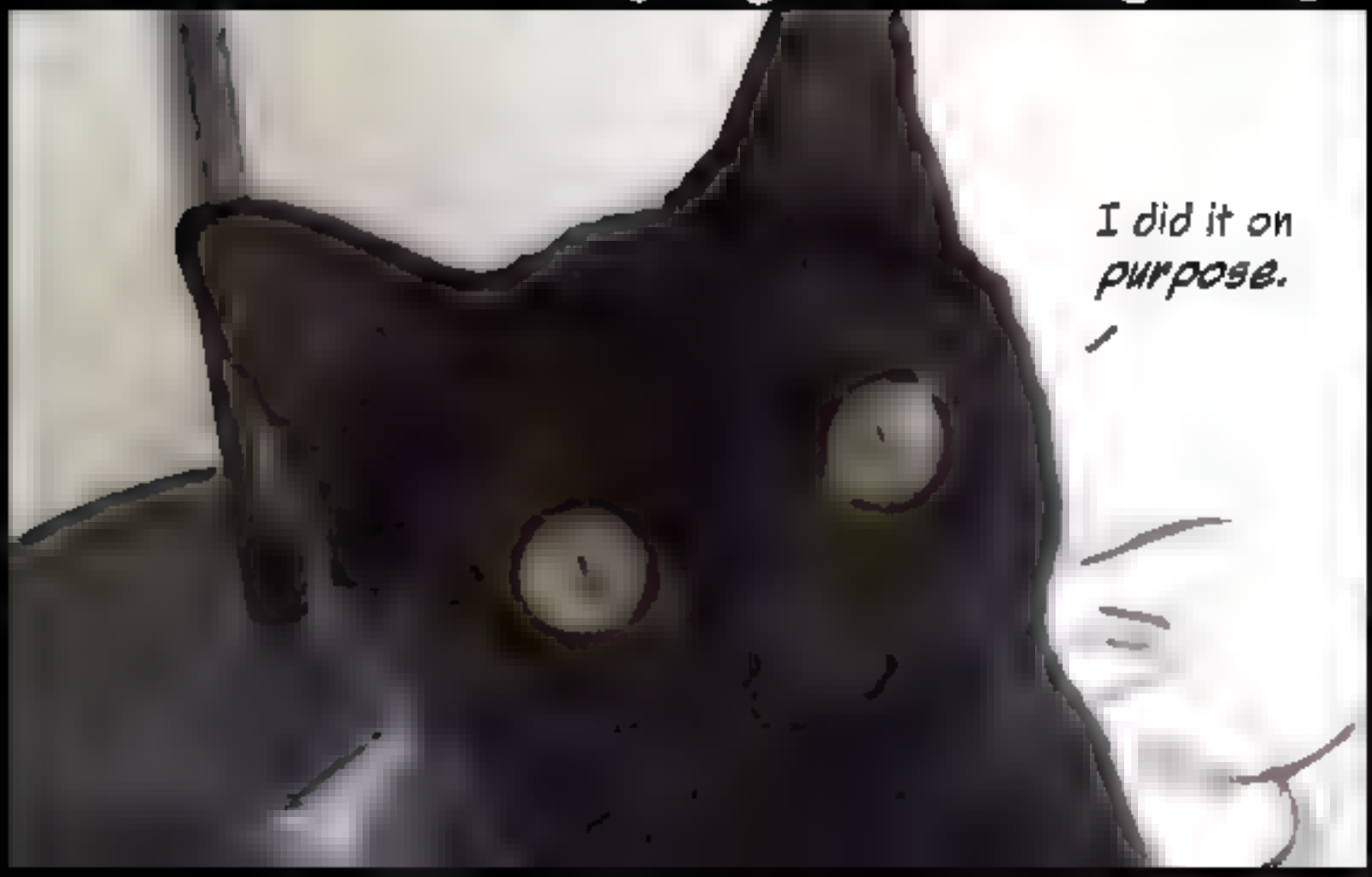
I'm sorry there's no comic for today.

Monday morning we woke up to the sounds of Kurt (pictured below) puking his guts out. He continued to vomit throughout the morning and one time it was almost all blood. We made multiple trips to the vet's office and had a variety of expensive tests performed on him to make sure our horrible monster kitty wasn't dying.

The doctors aren't sure what was wrong, but they treated him for a few things. He seems to be feeling much better, but he's still not quite up to his usual wanton acts of needless destruction. He's going to be on a couple medications for a while and we have to keep an eye on his symptoms for the next few days.

I'll have something for you later tonight or Wednesday and be back on schedule for Thursday's comic. I'm just too stressed out to do anything worth reading today.



I HONESTLY WONDER WHAT YOU GUYS WOULD DO WITHOUT ME.

ENJOY LIFE?

NOT ONLY DID I DEVISE A METHOD TO SAVE OUR LIVES USING THE MEAGER RESOURCES AVAILABLE..

..BUT I WAS IMMEDIATELY ABLE TO ADAPT THESE PLANS TO THE TEMPORARY LOSS OF FIGHTER

I THINK THE COLD HAS SLOWED THE LIBERAL FLOW OF MY BLOOD.

YEAH, IT'S ALSO GOING TO GIVE US HYPOTHERMIA UNLESS ***CAPTAIN BIG MOUTH*** GETS TO THE POINT

OR DO YOU PLAN TO KEEP US ALIVE BY EXPOSING US TO YOUR PARTICULAR BRAND OF HOT AIR?

OH MAN, THAT'S A CLASSIC.

I PITY WHOMEVER I'M WITH THE NEXT TIME I'M FREEZING TO DEATH.

WELL--

WAIT!

"..OF HOT AIR" OKAY, GO ON.

RIGHT

SO, BASED ON THE PRINCIPLE OF HOT AIR BEING HOT, AS BLACK MAGE ALLUDED TO, I TOOK IT UPON MYSELF TO INVESTIGATE THE SOURCE OF HOT AIR AS A CONCEPT

LONG, ***BRILLIANT*** STORY OF ANALYTICAL GENIUS SHORT HEAT COMES FROM ENERGY THE GREATEST SOURCE OF ENERGY IS FUSION

SO, IN A ***STUNNING*** LEAP OF MENTAL POWER, I CONSTRUCTED OUR OWN FUSION GENERATOR OUT OF WHAT I COULD FIND

THERE'S NOTHING BUT ICE FOR THOUSANDS AND THOUSANDS OF MILES.

HOW ELSE DO YOU PROPOSE TO CREATE ***COLD*** FUSION?

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YOU'VE CREATED A GIANT BLOCK OF ICE

IN THE FORM OF A COLD FUSION REACTOR, YES.

ER, OF COURSE

NOW, EXPLAIN HOW THIS WAS GOING TO HELP US SURVIVE?

GIVEN: FUSION CREATES ENERGY ENERGY THEN BEGETS HEAT

THEREFORE **COLD** FUSION MAKES COLD ENERGY THAT GIVES OFF **COLD** HEAT

WHAT?

BUT SINCE WE WANT WARM, OR "NON-IMAGINARY" FORMS OF HEAT, WE'D HAVE TO REVERSE IT

THE OPPOSITE OF COLD FUSION IS COLD FISSION. SEE?

THAT'S WHY I NEEDED FIGHTER HE WAS GOING TO SPLIT THE ICE

COLD FISSION WOULD MAKE HOT COLD, AND WARM US IN THIS DESOLATE PLACE.

HE'D SPLIT IT WITH HIS SWORD

OH, I GET IT

NOW THAT FIGHTER IS DOWN, WE'LL HAVE TO TRY SOMETHING ELSE

LIKE TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE FACT THAT ICE IS A NATURAL INSULATOR OF HEAT AND HOLLOW OUT AN ICE SHELTER TO BLOCK THE BITTER WINDS THAT ARE ASSAULTING US.

THIEF, THIS IS NO TIME FOR YOUR CRAZY VOODOO PHYSICS. ICE IS COLD, SO IT WOULD INSULATE COLDNESS.

NO, OUR COURSE IS CLEAR.

WE MUST BUILD AN EVEN **LARGER** BLOCK OF ICE TO PUSH THIS ONE ONTO FIGHTER'S SWORD AT A PRECISE ANGLE THUS SPLITTING IT TO UNLEASH PRECIOUS COLD FISSION ENERGIES.

I SHOULD LIKE TO HIRE YOU FOR AN ASSASSINATION, GOOD SIR.

OH, NO. THIS ONE IS FREE OF CHARGE, I INSIST.

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CON-GRATULATIONS, RED MAGE. YOU'VE KILLED US. WE ALL KNEW IT WOULD HAPPEN, IT WAS JUST A MATTER OF HOW, WHEN, AND WHERE.

WE ARE ALL LOSING FEELING IN OUR EXTREMITIES.

TURNING ON ONE ANOTHER WON'T SOLVE ANY-THING.

SHUT UP, I'M NOT DONE BLAMING EVERYONE WHO ISN'T ME.

THIEF, YOUR CAREER AS OUR LEADER REMINDS ME OF WATCHING A BLIND CHILD STUMBLE THROUGH AN UNEVEN ROOM LACED WITH KNIVES AND TIGER PITS.

WHO'S MOM'S FAVORITE *NOW!*

ONLY NOT AS INTERESTING TO WATCH BECAUSE YOU CAN ALWAYS PUSH THE KID IF IT LOOKS LIKE HE'D MAKE IT

WAIT YOU MURDERED YOUR OWN BLIND BROTHER?

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ***CRUEL*** TO LET HIM LIVE AFTER WHAT I DID TO HIS EYES.

WAS THERE A POINT IN ALL THAT? YOUR RAMBLINGS SEEM LESS COHERENT THAN USUAL.

PROBABLY IT'S COLD AND I'M TIRED. LEAVE ME ALONE

I TOO AM TIRED

I BLAME ALL THE GENIUS-ING I'VE DONE OF LATE.

COULDN'T IT BE HYPOTHERMIA?

URBAN MYTH.

IN THAT CASE, A QUICK NAP COULDN'T HURT. I'D HATE TO DIE EXHAUSTED

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SOME TIME LATER.

HOPE I DIDN'T MISS MUCH.

MONICA! HOW COULD YOU, WHO IS MY WIFE NOW FOR SOME REASON, SLEEP WITH MY BEST FRIEND?

I'M SORRY, CHANDLER. IT'S GOTTEN HARD TO KEEP TRACK OF WHO'S MARRIED TO WHO.

WAT, WHO AM I SLEEPING WITH?

DUNNO, RACH. I THINK IT'S ALL OF US.

OH, FRIENDS. IS THERE NO BORDER-LINE INCESTUAL RELATIONSHIP YOU WON'T EMBARK UPON?

DING DONG

THAT'S ODD. I DON'T HAVE A DOOR-BELL.

KNOCK KNOCK?

OR A DOOR.

LOUSY FOOD'S GONNA GET WARM IF THIS KEEPS UP.

THIS HAD BETTER BE GOOD. I'M A VERY IMPORTANT YETI IN THESE PARTS.

EVEN IF IT IS AN UNINHABITED ARCTIC WASTE LAND.

WHAT ARE YOU GUYS SUPPOSED TO BE?

OH.

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AM I CRAZY, OR WAS THE HOLLOWED OUT BODY OF THAT YETI THE MOST COMFORTABLE BED YOU'VE EVER SLEPT IN?

IT WAS UNNECESSARILY AND DELICIOUSLY MORBID

AND BEING SPOONED UP WAS A NICE WAY FOR US TO BOND OUTSIDE OF WORK, Y'KNOW?

THE NEXT DAY...

LET US NEVER SPEAK OF THIS DAY AGAIN.

QUIT YE WORD TALKIN', KNAVE

DO YE SEE WHAT I DO BE SEEIN' THAR?

WHAR?

UP THAR.

NUH-

RIGHT. LET'S GET THEM DOWN AND KILL THEM.

I THINK THEY'RE ALREADY DEAD

WELL, IF WE KILL THEM, WE'LL KNOW FOR SURE, WON'T WE.

THAT'S NOT HOW WE DO THINGS IN THIS ORGANIZATION.

YEAH, I'D HATE IT IF WE WERE SMART ABOUT SOMETHINGS.

AS VILLAINS, IT'S OUR JOB TO HAUGHTILY ASSUME OUR PLUCKY RIVALS WERE SOUNDLY DEFEATED BY MUNDANE MEANS WITHOUT ANYONE TO WITNESS THEIR DEMISE. ALSO, IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW EASILY WE ARE THWARTED IN OUR VARIED AND CONSTANT ATTEMPTS ON THEIR LIVES. THEIR APPARENT DEATH PROVES WE WOULD HAVE BEATEN THEM EVENTUALLY ANYWAY.

NOW C'MON.

I SWEAR I SAW A COLD [illegible] ON THE ICE SOMEWHERE

IF WE CAN TURN IT INTO SOME KIND OF COLD FISSION GENERATOR, WE OUGHT TO HAVE A USE FOR IT THEN.

I HATE THIS TEAM AND EVERYONE IN IT.

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URGH. IT FEELS LIKE I'VE BEEN STABBED IN THE HEAD, DRAGGED INTO A CAVE OF ICE, HUNG UP-SIDE DOWN FOR DAYS, AND LEFT FOR ***DEAD***

IF ONLY THERE WAS SOME WAY FOR ME TO GET US DOWN AND SAVE MY FRIENDS' LIVES.

AH-***HA!***

I'LL USE MY INNATE AND THUS FAR UNDISCLOSED SUPERNATURAL AFFINITY FOR ALL THINGS "SWORD" TO WILL THAT BLADE INTO MY HANDS.

HURG!

OKAY THAT MADE ME DIZZY

EITHER I JUST MADE UP THESE POW-ERS, OR...

I MUST NOT BE TRYING ENOUGH!

HEARING

MUST'VE BLOWN OUT MY EARS.

'CAUSE ALL I CAN HEAR IS THIS STUPID LOUD RUMBLE

ICE CAVE ENTRANCE!

OH, IT STOPPED

ALSO, IT GETS DARK ***FAST*** AROUND HERE.

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Day 3
The mysteriously slain yeti that has sustained us since waking up in this arctic prison has nearly been exhausted.

AWW, MAN. I WAS REALLY STARTING TO DIG THE GAMEY TASTE OF YAK MEAT

IT'S NOT YAK, IT'S YETI

IF WE'RE ***LUCKY*** THAT'LL BE CLOSE ***ENOUGH*** TO HUMAN THAT ONE OF US WILL TURN INTO THE WENDIGO.

THEN HE'LL PUNCH A HOLE IN THE WALL AND THE SURVIVORS, IF ANY, CAN GET OUT

If my comrades survive the night it will only be because I've passed out from exhaustion.

Day 4
Curse my well-rested state! The fools continue to live and they are clearly showing the early signs of cave madness.

WELL, WE DID WHAT WE COULD

YUP. NO SENSE IN FLIPPING OUT AT THIS POINT

WE HAD A GOOD RUN.

In their fevered minds, they plot my demise. I am alone now for the first time, but not the last time. And definitely not the first time.

Day 5
They have found a pit into the earth. Knowing they yearn for nothing less than my death, I stayed behind to fortify my defenses.

Nestled within my stoney womb, I could hear the wails of the damned echo from the cave's depths.

HEY, BLACK MAGE C'MERE!

My "friends" were already lost to me. Their sanity had been eroded by time

It was a decision that would save my life.

But now their husks would be infested by horrors from beneath the earth and beyond the ages.

HEY, BLACK MAGE. DIDN'T YOU HEAR US CALLING YOU?

THERE'S A WHOLE NET-WORK OF CAVES DOWN THERE. RED MAGE THINKS WE CAN FIND A WAY OUT

WHY IS HE SITTING IN A PILE OF ICE?

They spoke in a tongue of wet gurgles: the babble of a language without reason.

If you are reading this, then it is too late for me. Beseech you, reader tell my story. Let not my death be in vain.

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WILL YOU QUIT WORRYING, BM.

HEY, I KNOW WHAT I HEARD

SURE, I MIGHT'VE BEEN HALLUCINATING AT THE TIME.

BUT I'M PRETTY SURE SOME OF IT WAS KINDA REAL.

OH, COME ON

HOW MANY ANCIENT HORRORS OF THE DEEP COULD YOU FIT INTO ONE CAVE?

THIS IS NO TIME TO PANIC.

LET US NOT FORGET, I AM A GENIUS.

LOTS.

WE HAVE NO GUARANTEE THAT THEIR SENSORY ORGANS, AS NUMEROUS, MISSHAPPEN, AND MISPLACED AS THEY ARE, FUNCTION ANYTHING LIKE OUR OWN.

LET'S TURN AROUND, HOPE THEY DIDN'T SEE US, AND LEAVE

OKAY WE CAN MAKE THIS WORK IN OUR FAVOR.

REMEMBER, GENIUS!

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THE INTRUDERS HAVE BEEN SUBDUED, OH GREAT ONE.

BRING THEM FORTH SO THAT I MAY TAUNT THEM WITH MY RIDICULOUS OVER THE TOP VILLAINY

QUIT SHOVIN' SHORTSTACK

WHAT? THIS RABBLE ARE THE FABLED WARRIORS OF LIGHT?

THIS IS THE BEST DEFENSE THE WORLD OF MEN COULD MOUNT AGAINST OUR KIND?

HEY, DO WE COME TO YOUR TEA PARTY AND SLAP YOUR DISGUSTING GENITALS OUT OF YOUR MOTHER'S MOUTH?

THEY SPEAK OF OUR TEA PARTIES!?

THEY KNOW TOO MUCH!

THAT'S... THAT'S REAL GOOD, BLACK MAGE.

WHAT? THESE FRUITY CEPHALOPOD DORKS ARE ONE HADOKEN AWAY FROM EXTINCTION.

THAT'S A GREAT IDEA! I ALWAYS WANTED TO BE CRUSHED TO DEATH BY TONS OF ROCK AND ICE.

NO, I THINK YOU'RE CONFUSED SEE, A HADOKEN DOESN'T USE ROCK OR ICE ALSO, IT WOULD BE AIMED AWAY FROM US.

DRAMATIC REINACTMENT

THIS IS NEITHER ROCK NOR ICE.

(AIM AWAY FROM FACE)

YES, YES. I KNOW BUT THE EXPLOSION WOULD COLLAPSE AN UNHEALTHY CHUNK OF THE CONTINENT RIGHT ON TOP OF US.

OH.

IT IS NO MATTER

OUR PERVERSE RITUALS TO BRING ABOUT THE END OF ALL CREATION ARE NIGH

NOTHING CAN OPPOSE US NOT EVEN THE WARRIORS OF LIGHT

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YES, LIGHT WARRIORS, YOJ TRACKED US TO OUR ARCTIC UNDGROJND BASE BRAVO, BY THE WAY

BEFORE WE SACR FICE YOJ TO ETERNAL DARKNESS, I MUST KNOW HOW YOU DID IT

DID YOU CHANCE UPON OJR MAG C HIGH FREQUENCY GLOBAL MESSAGE BROADCASTING TO OUR MEMBERS ACROSS THE WORLD WHEN AND WHERE TO MEET?

IF SO YOU MJST HAVE THE WORLD'S GREATEST CRYPTOL-OGIST N YOJR EMPLOY

THE MESSAGE WAS ENCODED INTO FOUR LAYERS OF LANGUAGES WITH EACH ONE MORE IMPOSSIBLE THAN THE LAST

OR DID YOU MERELY CATCH A SLIGHT GLIMPSE OF OUR SUMMONS TO MADNESS?

PERHAPS ONE OF YOJR MAGES CONJURED UP A SPELL TO RETRO-ENGINEER THE OR GIN OF OUR SINISTER BROADCAST

DID YOU PULL THE KNOW-LEDGE FROM THE VERY STARS THEM-SELVES?

DID YOU CONSORT W TH THE LESSER THINGS OF THE DARK?

DID THEY REVEAL US IN THE THROES OF THEIR MADNESS?

THOSE ARE MASKS, RIGHT?

OURS ARE THE FACES OF EUCLID'S N GHT-MARES!

TO LOOK UPON JS IS TO KNOW AN ENDLESS DESPAIR!

I CAN SEE YOUR MOUTH MOVING UNDER THE MASK.

WE ARE BEINGS FORGED OF MAD-NESS! OUR MOJTHS HAVE MANY WAYS N WHICH TO MOVE!

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LOOK, BUDDY, WE DON'T CARE ABOUT YOUR LITTLE CULT, OR YOUR LAME CAVE OF ICE.

WE'RE NOT EVEN SURE HOW WE GOT HERE, SO IF IT'S ALL THE SAME TO YOU, WE'LL LEAVE YOU GUYS TO YOUR OWN HIDEOUS DEVICES.

REALLY, WE'LL PROBABLY FREEZE TO DEATH OUT THERE ANY-WAY

DO YOU THINK US FOOLS!?

I WAS THINKING OF AN F WORD...

WE ARE UPON THE CUSP OF BRINGING A NEW, ETERNAL AGE OF ENDLESS NIGHT UPON THIS ROCK

IT WAS FORETOLD TO US MILLENNIA AGO THAT THE BRINGERS OF LIGHT WOULD SEEK US OUT ONLY TO END OUR EVIL WAYS.

YEAH, THAT CAN'T BE US.

WE'RE ALREADY BOOKED TO SAVE THE WORLD FROM SOME OTHER JACKASS.

PLUS WE'VE GOT AT LEAST ONE GROUP FOR AN ARCH-NEMESIS.

AND THERE'S THIS SAGE WHO'S OLDER THAN TIME WITH INFINITE POWER WHO BOSSES US AROUND FOR NO REASON.

YO.

WE COULD TRY TO SQUEEZE YOU IN FOR A THWARTING WHEN WE'RE DONE WITH CHAOS IF YOU LIKE

GET YOUR NAME ON THE LIST EARLY, MAN. EVERYONE'S GONNA WANT US TO THWART THEM WHEN WE FINISH THIS BIG CHAOS JOB.

OH, WELL, OKAY

JUST PUT US DOWN UNDER MY NAME THEN OUR CULT CANNOT BE SAID OR WRITTEN W THOUT DR VING YOU MAD.

THAT'S [redacted] THREE R'S

I'VE THINK I'VE READ ENOUGH INSANITY LANGUAGES TO KNOW HOW TO SPELL THE NAMES OF THE NAMELESS

WAIT, YOUR NAME IS [redacted]

THAT'S A GIRL'S NAME

EVEN WORSE THAN LESLIE.

I'M SORRY, DID SOMEONE CALL FOR ME?

THESE ARE VERY OLD AND POWERFUL NAMES!

NO, LIZLIE

NO MORE NANE BICKERING! TO THE P T WITH YOU!

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SO HERE WE ARE, STARING DOWN THE GAPING MAW OF DEATH.

AGAIN.

I HAVE TO WONDER WHY THOSE GODLESS LITTLE NIHILISTIC MUTANTS ARE IN SUCH A HURRY TO KILL US.

IT'S NOT LIKE WE COULD SURVIVE THE THOUSANDS OF MILES OF ICE OR THE VAST OCEANS BEYOND THAT

SPEAKING OF WHICH..

WHAT IN THE HUNDRED HELLS ARE WE DOING ON A CONTINENT OF ICE ANYWAY?!

SARDA SENT US. THERE WAS TALK CONCERNING THE FROZEN BOWELS OF THE EARTH.

OTHER THAN YOU GUYS, AND ESPECIALLY FIGHTER, MY HATRED OF SARDA IS WITHOUT PEER.

HE SAID WE'D FIND AN ITEM OF GREAT POWER THAT WOULD HELP US TO FULFILL OUR DESTINY.

THIS IS A BARREN, FEATURELESS WASTELAND

THE ONLY PEOPLE WE'VE MET ARE A BAND OF CULTISTS HALF MAD FROM STARVATION WHO ARE BENT ON DESTROYING THE WORLD THROUGH INCEST

THEN THEY THREW US INTO THIS PIT

THERE IS NO ITEM OF POWER IN THIS DEAD PLACE

DO YOU THINK HE MEANT MY COLD FUSION GENERATOR?

MAYBE IT'S LIKE A BOX OF CEREAL AND THE SPECIAL PRIZE IS BURIED AT THE VERY BOTTOM SO YOU HAVE TO DIG AND DIG AND DIG TO GET IT

OH GOD, IS THAT WHY THERE WAS ALWAYS CEREAL ON THE KITCHEN FLOOR?

I THOUGHT YOU WERE JUST A SLOB, I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE ELBOW DEEP IN THE BOX.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU WASH YOUR HANDS ANYWAY?

ONCE A WEEK WHETHER I NEED IT OR NOT!

I'M GOING TO BE SICK NOW PLEASE MAKE ROOM.

HOLD THAT HORF

MY KEEN ELFISH SENSES DETECT SOMETHING IN THIS PIT

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LOOK UPON OUR DARK MASTER FROM BEYOND THE STARS AND KNOW THAT YOUR LIVES ARE NOTH NG, WARRIORS OF L GHT!

PIT OF DOOM
WATCH YOUR STEP!

I DON'T THINK THEY CAN HEAR YOU DOWN THERE. THE ECHO IS PRETTY BAD.

REALLY?

PIT OF DOOM
WATCH YOUR STEP!

BET I COULD SPIT ON ONE

BATTLE POSITIONS GO!

AH MAN. I'VE GOT, UGH, Y'KNOW WHEN YOU'RE GOING TO THROW UP AND YOUR MOUTH GETS WATERY I'VE GOT THAT NOW.

IT'S HERE! IT'S.. THE WORST THING IMAGINABLE. I KNOW THAT ALL MY LIFE HAS BEEN A WASTE.

THIEF?! THIEF!

OKAY, DON'T PANIC, WHAT IS THIS TH,NG?

IT'S TAKING APART MY MIND AT A CONCEPTUAL LEVEL.

THERE'S NO LIMIT TO ITS NOTHING-NESS.

I CAN'T.. THERE'S NO STATS FOR IT

FIGHTER, DON'T LOOK AT IT!

SO BEAUTIFUL THEY SHOULD MAKE

DON'T LOOK AT WHAT?

OH.

OKAY, I TH,NK IT'S PASSED.

URGH, I SWEAR I COULD TASTE IT THERE FOR A SECOND UGH!

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OKAY, SO WHAT WAS ALL THIS TALK ABOUT "BATTLE ACTION GO" OR WHATEVER? GUYS?

DID YOU JERKS FIND A WAY OUT OF HERE AND LEAVE ME TO ROT THE WAY I HOPED TO DO TO YOU?

WHAT IN THE...

BOMBASTIC CLASSICAL MUSIC!

WHAT? THIS IS *IT*? THE UGLY THING WOULD ALMOST BE *CUTE* IF IT WEREN'T SO HIDEOUS.

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SO IT'S COME TO THIS, HAS IT? ME VS. A HIDEOUS EYE-STALK.

I'D PITY THIS PERVERSION OF NATURE IF I DIDN'T ENJOY HURTING THINGS SO MUCH.

THE QUESTION NOW IS WHICH OF MY DEVASTATING ATTACKS DO I USE ON THIS THING.

I HAVE ENOUGH DOOM SPELLS TO END THE WORLD TWICE OVER

HELL, IF I *THINK* HARD ENOUGH, I COULD TURN ITS BLOOD INTO RAZOR BLADES OR SOMETHING.

OF COURSE, GIANT EYES ARE GREAT FOR STABBING, I...

DID SOMETHING HAPPEN WHEN I WASN'T LOOK-ING?

INFINITE NOTHINGNESS *SUCKS*.

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ALONE FOREVER IN A DARK INFINITY THERE *ARE* WORSE FATES.

HEYA, BLACK MAGE!

I CAN *HEAR* ONE OF THOSE WORSE FATES NOW...

WE WERE HOPING YOU'D SHOW UP.

WHERE ARE WE AND HOW CAN I GET AWAY FROM YOU?

IT'S HARD TO SAY, REALLY.

SPACE-TIME APPEARS TO BE NON-DISCRETE HERE.

YOU CAN SEE US A FEW SECONDS INTO THE FUTURE OVER THERE.

AND THERE *YOU* ARE A FEW SECONDS AGO.

PRECISELY

WE'RE DOWN THERE TOO. I WONDER WHY I'M SAYING "OH"?

IN THIS FRACTURED SHARD, THIS PHANTOM-LIKE ZONE, WE CAN'T BE SURE CAUSALITY IS MAINTAINED.

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO KNOW UNTIL WE CATCH UP TO THAT POINT IN THIS REALM'S DISJOINTED FLOW OF TIME.

OH.

TIME AND SPACE ARE INDEPENDENT HERE. DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT THE IMPLICATIONS ARE FOR BENDING THE RULES?

YOU COULD USE OUT OF CHARACTER KNOWLEDGE BEFORE YOU EVEN *HAD* IT!

OR, IF WE'RE INTERESTED IN *GOOD* IDEAS...

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IF TIME AND SPACE WORK INDEPENDENTLY IN THIS WORLD, THEN THERE'S LIKE HUNDREDS OF INSTANCES OF US.

THAT'S ONE WAY TO SEE IT.

I SAW THE FUTURE YOU DOING IT DOWN THERE

I'M DOING IT IN THE FUTURE BECAUSE YOU TOLD ME ABOUT IT IN THE PAST... BUT ONLY BECAUSE YOU SAW ME DOING IT IN THE FUTURE

SO WHAT'S STOPPING US FROM GATHERING ALL OUR VERSIONS INTO A SINGLE, INVINCIBLE ARMY?

THAT PLAN...IT ESCHEWS NORMAL PHYSICS, IT'S RIDICULOUSLY EPIC...

IT'S ***PERFECTION*** THIEF! WHERE DID YOU COME UP WITH SUCH A GREAT IDEA?

WHERE DID THE PLAN COME FROM? INFORMATION CANNOT ERUPT INTO BEING FROM NOTHINGNESS.

IT'S A PARADOX!

I TRY NOT TO THINK ABOUT IT

SO WHAT DO WE DO WITH AN ARMY OF INFINITE US?

I HADN'T THOUGHT THAT FAR AHEAD THIS JUST SEEMED COOL.

WE COULD ASK OUR FUTURE SELVES WHAT WE DID WITH ALL OF US TO GET OUT

THE IDEA THAT PROGRESS CAN ONLY BE MADE BY DEPENDING UPON PARADOXES IN CASUALITY APPEALS TO MY SENSE OF TWINKERY, BUT I CAN'T SEE THAT FAR AHEAD

LOOK, WE HAVE LIMITLESS RESOURCES, MANPOWER, AND TIME AT OUR DISPOSAL.

OUR OPTIONS ARE SURPRISINGLY FEW.

WE COULD BUILD A UTOPIAN CITY TO LIVE OUR AGELESS LIVES AMONGST OUR-SELVES.

THIEFVILLE

LORDING OVER A DEAD UNIVERSE *IS* A LIFE-LONG DREAM OF MINE

OR WE COULD FIGHT TO THE DEATH FOREVER

ALSO GOOD

NO NEED! MY GENIUS, WHICH I'D FOOLISHLY ASSUMED TO HAVE SOME UPPER, IF NIGH-IMPOSSIBLE, LIMIT HAS JUST SOLVED OUR LITTLE PROBLEM. AGAIN!

I THINK WE'RE ON THE SAME PAGE FOR ONCE.

FIRST WE FIGHT TO THE DEATH. *THEN* WHEN ALL YOU JERKS ARE SLAIN, THE BLACK MAGES WILL RULE OVER THIS DEAD UNIVERSE

IT'S THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS. LET'S START

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DO WE REALLY NEED BLACK CANDLES?

THE ANCIENT TEXTS, THOUGH WRITTEN IN A LANGUAGE BEFORE WORDS, ARE QUITE CLEAR.

WHERE ARE WE SUPPOSED TO FIND CANDLES—BLACK OR OTHERWISE—IN THIS DESOLATE WASTELAND?

WE ARE A CULT DEDICATED TO EVIL.

IF WE DIDN'T BRING POINTLESSLY BLACK CANDLES, WE REALLY DROPPED THE BALL.

YES, YES FINE. LOOK, WE'LL KILL LV'RN AND MAKE CANDLES FROM HIS INNARDS.

BUT THEY NEED TO BE BLACK TOO.

WE ARE THE FOUL THINGS MEN BECOME WHEN NAMELESS HORRORS INFEST THEIR BONES. THERE WILL BE NO SHORTAGE OF BLACK IN HIS INNARDS.

A FINE POINT.

YES, I KNOW.

ARE WE SURE THIS IS GOING TO WORK?

OF COURSE WE ARE, WE THOUGHT OF IT, DIDN'T WE.

NO ONE ELSE SEEMS TO LIKE IT

OH, THEY NEVER DO.

GUYS CAN WE FOCUS? THIS UNIVERSE ISN'T GOING TO DESTROY ITSELF

THOSE MOUTHBREATHERS WHINGE ABOUT EVERY LITTLE THING WE DO, BUT WE BRING THEM, KICKING AND SCREAMING, TO NEW VISTAS OF IMAGINATION AND, DARE I SAY IT, GENIUS.

HE'S RIGHT

WE ALWAYS ARE

WE ALREADY MADE THE CALCULATIONS. SO THAT INFORMATION EXISTS IN ALL OF OUR FUTURE-INCLINED INSTANCES.

IS EVERYONE IN POSITION YET?

NO, BUT I CAN SEE FROM HERE THEY WILL BE SOON.

LET'S RIP CAUSALITY A NEW ONE!

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OKAY, IS EVERYONE HERE?

ARE WE READY TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN?

I DON'T WANT TO FIND OUT HALF WAY THROUGH THIS THING THAT ONE OF YOU GUYS COULDN'T BE BOTHERED TO LEARN HIS INCOMPRENSIBLE LINES.

WE SCREW THIS UP AND ALL THE OTHER CRAZY DOOM CULTS WILL BE LAUGHING AT US.

LET US BEGIN.

WE'RE IN POSITION? GOOD

MARK!

ON MY MARK EVERYONE RETROACTIVELY ENGAGE PLAN: OMEGA TO ALPHA.

IT'S WORKING! WE WILL BREACH THE BOUNDARIES OF ALL THAT IS ETERNAL NOTHING!

CHECK IT OUT, WE'RE ALL ALIVE AND STUFF

TOLD YOU IT'D WORK

THOSE JERK CULTISTS ARE STILL HERE, BUT WHERE'D OL' CHUCKLES GET TO?

WHY AREN'T YOU KILLING THEM YET?!

FOUND 'IM.

YOU HEARD THE MAN.

THE HALF-MAN. THING.

WHATEVER

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WE CAME TO THE FROZEN ASSHOLE OF THE PLANET LIKE SARDA SAID

WHAT I WANNA KNOW IS WHERE'S THE CRAPPY ITEM OF GREAT POWER WE WERE PROMISED 'CAUSE I DON'T SEE IT.

IF IT'S SOMETHING LAME AND IMMATERIAL LIKE "FRIENDSHIP" OR "TRUST", I'LL HAVE TO CUT HIS FACE OFF

YEAH, I DON'T NEED A QUEST TO TEACH ME THE IMPORTANCE OF FAKING FRIENDSHIP

GUYS! I FOUND IT! I FOUND OUR ITEM OF INCREDIBLE POWER!

SERIOUSLY I'LL DO IT NO JURY IN THE WORLD WOULD CONVICT ME.

WHY ARE YOU WEARING THAT?

'CAUSE IT'S TOTALLY BITCHIN' ICE ARMOR!

IT'S LITERALLY MADE OF ICE, ISN'T IT.

YUP! ITS ICY CORE PROTECTS ME AGAINST THE COLD IT'S WORKING SO WELL I CAN'T EVEN FEEL MY LIMBS ANY MORE.

THAT'S PERHAPS THE STUPIDEST THING I'VE HEARD, SO YOU'RE NOT NEARLY SMART ENOUGH TO HAVE THOUGHT OF THIS ON YOUR OWN.

AND SINCE I HAVEN'T SEEN THIEF IN THE LAST THREE MINUTES...

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT THIS GREAT NEW SPELL I LEGITIMATELY INVENTED JUST NOW.

Blast of Ice
(a totally real spell)

Spell Components:
Ice

Gesantic Components:
Throw (ice)

SOUNDS LEGITIMATE

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YOU SHOULD REALLY THINK ABOUT IT THEY'RE GOING FAST.

I THINK YOU MEANT TO SAY "SOMATIC" HERE...

I KNOW WHAT I MEANT

EVERYONE WHO KN'T ME IS A SUCKER.

UH-HUH.

SORRY TO DISAPPOINT, BUT I'M NOT AS EASILY FOOLED AS CAPTAIN HYPOTHERMIA AND KID GULLIBLE OVER THERE.

I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW GREAT THIS ARMOR IS. IT'S LIKE YOUR ICE SPELLS ARE NOTHING TO ME

WHY, THAT JUST PROVES THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MY NEW ICE BLAST!

AM I THE ONLY ONE CONCERNED WITH OUR SURVIVAL HERE?

ALSO, I THINK MY HEART STOPPED BEATING.

OKAY, THE SURVIVAL OF MOST OF US.

IF I KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT MEDICINE, THEN CASTING MORE ICE SPELLS WILL REACT WITH YOUR ICE ARMOR TO HEAL YOU.

THE SURVIVAL OF *SOME* OF US.

SCREW IT, JUST MY SURVIVAL.

WHAT'D I DO?

YOU'RE *THIEF*

GUILTY AS CHARGED

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WWW.[illegible]

WHAT'CHA DOIN'?

IN A BIZARRE TWIST OF RESPONSIBILITY, I'M FASHIONING TOGETHER A BOAT FROM THE SKINS OF THE CULTISTS WE SLAUGHTERED

NO, THAT'S STUPID

YEAH, YOU'RE RIGHT I BET **ELF SKIN** WOULD WORK BETTER

THAT'S SUPER

HEY, I DECIDED THAT YOU BOUGHT MY ICE AND ICE-LIKE PRODUCTS BUSINESS

BASICALLY, IN EXCHANGE FOR THE BOOK RIGHTS TO YOUR LIFE STORY, YOU GET TO RUN THE COMPANY.

I KEEP ALL THE ICE AND ICE-LIKE PROFITS AND YOU'LL BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR ANY LOSSES FROM, SAY, LAWSUITS. OF COURSE.

WHO THE HELL IS GOING TO SUE?!

THERE'S A SUMMONS IN MY HAT ISN'T THERE

YOU'RE SUING ME?!

I SPILLED A CUP OF ICE IN MY LAP AND IT WAS BELOW FREEZING. YOU SHOULD KEEP ICE AT ROOM TEMPERATURE

ROOM TEMPERATURE IS BELOW FREEZING!

WELL, YOU SHOULD'VE THOUGHT OF THAT BEFORE YOU GOT INTO THE ICE AND ICE-LIKE PRODUCTS BUSINESS.

I DIDN'T!

OH NO.

DON'T WORRY, I'M WILLING TO SETTLE

NOW I GET YOUR MOVIE RIGHTS TOO.

BUT YOU COULD'VE EASILY INCLUDED THAT IN THE INITIAL CONTRACT

WHY DID YOU MAKE US GO THROUGH ALL THIS?

IF YOU DON'T LIKE HOW I DO BUSINESS, THEN WHY'D YOU LET ME KEEP A CONTROLLING INTEREST IN THE COMPANY?

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YEE HEE HEE HEE!

AH HA HA HA!

WHAT IN THE DAMN HELL ARE YOU DOING?

FIGHTER NEED TO FIND FIGHTER

HE'S OVER THERE. I THINK THIEF IS SELLING HIM HIS NON-ICED ARMOR BACK

YEE HEE HEE HEE!

THE FUTILITY OF SURVIVAL HAS FINALLY BROKEN HIS MIND

IT COMES AS NO SURPRISE THAT I'M UNAFFECTED BY THE UTTER HOPELESSNESS THAT'S CHOKING THE LIFE FROM OUR FROZEN BONES.

ONLY I POSSESS THE DETERMINATION TO FACE OUR IMMINENT DEATHS WITH DIGNITY

WHY, *WHY* MUST ONE AS BEAUTIFUL AS I MEET SUCH A FATE AS THIS?

OH, TERRIBLE DESTINY! YOUR COLD HEART HAS SWALLOWED US!

TRAPPED FOREVER IN THE LEFT VENTRICLE — THE LEAST SYMPATHETIC OF THE FOUR CHAMBERS — WE ARE WITHOUT SALVATION!

WHAT IS HELL, YOU ASK?

IT IS HOPELESSNESS AND THIS IS IT, I SAY!

WHEN DID WE GET A BOAT?

TWENTY MINUTES LATER...

THERE'S A DOOMSDAY CULT IN THE ARCTIC, YOU SAID

WE'LL SLAY THEM AND SAVE THE WORLD, YOU SAID

LET'S SCOUT AROUND FOR THEM, YOU SAID

WE WON'T HAVE TO GUARD THE SHIP, YOU SAID.

IT'S NOT LIKE THERE'S ANYONE OUT HERE TO STEAL IT, YOU SAID

WHERE'S OUR BOAT, BARRY!

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OKAY, ESCAPING FROM AN ALTERNATE REALITY WITHOUT REALLY KNOWING HOW, I CAN TAKE. BUT SOMEONE'S REALLY GOT TO EXPLAIN THIS BOAT

OH, I CAN EXPLAIN HOW WE BENT THE LAWS OF A DEAD UNIVERSE TO SAFELY EXPEL US FROM IT!

NO, I DON'T CARE. I ACCEPT WE'RE HERE NOW I WISH ONLY TO KNOW HOW HERE GOT TO INVOLVE A BOAT

ALTHOUGH, FOR THE SAKE OF ACCURACY, I SHOULD HAVE SAID "HOW I BENT THE LAWS OF A DEAD UNIVERSE"

SERIOUSLY, I'M OVER IT.

IT BEGAN, AS SO MANY THINGS DO, WITH MY INCREDIBLE INTELLECT COLLECTING DATA WITHOUT ME KNOWING IT

THE CULTISTS KEPT PRATTLING ABOUT SWALLOWING THE WORLD IN DARKNESS.

NO ONE CARES!

STOP

THEN THEY SHOVED US INTO THEIR OWN PERSONAL REALM OF AN ENDLESS DARKNESS.

CLEARLY IT WAS THEIR PLAN TO SHOVE THAT DIMENSION ONTO OUR OWN.

YOU'VE BEEN WARNED THROE.

SO IT WAS A SIMPLE MATTER OF ALIGNING OUR VARIOUS CHRONO-SPATIALLY DISPLACED SELVES SO THE FUTURE-MOST VERSIONS OF US PRE-EMPTED OUR PAST-MOST SELVES TO CREATE A PARADOX AT THE EXACT MOMENT THE CULTISTS WERE GOING TO SUMMON DOOM FOR OUR WORLD SO THEY GOT US INSTEAD WHILE THEIR DIMENSION SWALLOWED ITSELF AND ALL OUR PREVIOUS VERSIONS INTO A LOGICAL QUANDRY OF NONEXISTENCE!

THUNK

OH DEAR

HOW DID WE GET THIS BOAT?

WE FOUND IT PARKED OUTSIDE. NO ONE WAS ON BOARD, SO IT'S OURS.

THANK YOU.

ALSO, WE TOOK EVERYTHING THE CULTISTS LEFT BEHIND.

I'M SURE IT'S PERFECTLY SAFE

OH, OF COURSE.

NO SHIP WITH A MYSTERIOUS CARGO COULD BE IN DANGER.

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WHAT WAS I DOING AGAIN. ?

YOU'RE DOWN HERE GUARDING THE CARGO

RIGHT!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

I'M DOWN HERE MAKING SURE YOU DON'T DO ANYTHING STUPID .IKE OPEN ONE OF THOSE CRATES.

NOW [redacted] I WANT TO OPEN ONE OF THESE CRATES?

I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT'S INSIDE THEM. IT COULD BE ANYTHING. L.KE KILLER MAN-EATING BEARS OR FIRE

BUT WHY WOULD YOU PUT FIRE .N A BOX?

SO OBVIOUSLY, THEY'RE SHIPPING BEARS. FOR THE CIRCUS

WAIT, YOU DON'T WANT MAN-EATING BEARS FOR THE CIRCUS

THEY'RE PROBABLY TAKING THE BEARS TO A NATURE PRESERVE AS GUARDS

I BET THEY'RE AS STRONG AS BEARS! MAYBE TWICE AS STRONG YEAH. THEY WON'T EVEN NEED THEIR SWORDS. I'D BETTER OPEN THE CRATES AND GET THOSE SWORDS BEFORE THEY GO TO WASTE IN THERE

BUGLE

CIRCUS SLAYING

Killer Bears Sought for Questioning

Spider-Man is Probably to Blame for it Though

NO REPEAT CUSTOMERS.

I CAN'T OPEN THE CRATES. YOU'RE STANDING IN MY WAY FOR SOME REASON.

WHAT WERE WE JUST TALKING ABOUT, FIGHTER?

YOU WEREN'T REALLY .ISTENING EITHER, HUH?

WHY DID I VOLUNTEER FOR THIS?

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IF YOU'RE HERE, THEN WHERE'S FIGHTER?

BELOW DECKS ACTING AS OUR MEATSHIELD, NATURALLY

IF ANYTHING EVIL OR ELDRITCH POPS OUT OF THOSE CRATES, HE'LL DIE SLOWLY AND LOUDLY ENOUGH FOR THE REST OF US TO RUN AWAY.

YOU KNOW BETTER THAN ANY OF US THAT HE NEEDS ADULT SUPERVISION!

DON'T WORRY. I'VE TAKEN CARE OF IT

HELLO?

BLACK MAGE?

WHAT HAVE WE HERE?

"THERE IS A MAP TO SWORDTOWN ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS NOTE." YEE!

"THERE IS A MAP TO SWORDTOWN ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS NOTE" YEE!

BESIDES, AREN'T YOU SUPPOSED TO BE PILOTING THIS BOAT?

DON'T WORRY I'VE TAKEN CARE OF IT

OH!

WHAT'S CONFUSING IS HOW THIS SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA TO ME AT SOME POINT

OH, NOW I GET IT.

HMM "THERE IS A MAP TO SWORDTOWN ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS NOTE."

"THERE IS A MAP TO SWORDTOWN ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS NOTE." DARN IT

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AND *THAT'S* THE AMAZING TALE OF OUR MIRACULOUS VICTORY OVER THE EYE

JUST THE LATEST IN A SERIES OF UNNECESSARILY HARROWING EVENTS INTRODUCED TO MY LIFE THANKS TO MORONS LIKE RM.

IT SAID IT KNEW THE WAY

IT WAS GOING TO TAKE US OUT OF REALITY. *AGAIN.*

I THOUGHT IT WAS A SHORTCUT.

YES, FASCINATING. YOU KNOW OF COURSE I DON'T BELIEVE A SINGLE WORD OF IT.

AND WHY WOULD YOU?

ALSO, I SUGGEST YOU DON'T TELL ANYONE ELSE ABOUT THIS AS I OWN YOUR LIFE-STORIES.

YOU'D BE COMMITTING PLAGIARISM!

IN OTHER NEWS, I LOVE MY LIFE

YOU EVER GET THE FEELING THAT THE UNIVERSE IS A VAST, IMPERSONAL EMPTINESS THAT EXISTS ONLY TO HURT YOU?

YES. IT'S HOW WE KNOW THE DM IS DOING HIS JOB

HEY GUYS! DID YOU HEAR HOW THIEF SINGLE-HANDEDLY DEFEATED THE EYE MONSTER AGAIN?

AND HOW YOU TWO JUST SAT IN A CORNER WEEPING THE WHOLE TIME?

YEAH, WE HEARD SOMETHING MORE OR LESS ALONG THOSE LINES.

OH, BLACK MAGE, YOU'LL *NEVER* GUESS WHERE I'VE BEEN!

NO, DON'T TELL ME.

I WANT TO FIGURE IT OUT

HE IS *SO* STUMPED

WHAT A SUCKER

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EVENTUALLY, AT THE DOCKS OF CIVILIZATION

WELL, WE FAILED TO GET WHATEVER ITEM OF INCREDIBLE POWER WAS SUPPOSED TO BE LODGED IN THE ARCTIC

I'M NOT SURE WHAT SARDA IS LIKE WHEN HE'S MAD, BUT I BET I'D RATHER SEE IT HAPPEN TO OTHER GUYS.

CORRECTION.

YOU FAILED TO FIND THE ITEM OF POWER

THESE COMPLETELY LEGIT AIRSHIP STUBS I JUST MADE CLEARLY SHOW THAT I WAS IN CORNERIA ON BUSINESS THE WHOLE TIME

WE COULD TELL HIM THE ITEM OF POWER MOVED TO A NEW APARTMENT-CAVE AND DIDN'T LEAVE A FORWARDING ADDRESS.

HMM, IF ANYTHING COULD TRICK AN OMNISCIENT BEING LIKE SARDA, IT'D BE THE POSTAL SERVICE.

BAH

I'VE GOT JUST ONE WORD FOR THE JERK.

NADOW!

THAT, THAT'D PROBABLY HAVE WORKED BETTER IF YOU HADN'T JUST WASTED IT

I DON'T THINK IT WAS A *COMPLETE* WASTE...

WHY WOULD A KIND AND JUST GOD DESTROY A BARGE FULL OF MEDICINES AND FOOD FOR DYING ORPHANS? WHY!

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OKAY, SO WE'RE ALL AGREED ON THIS?

I DON'T KNOW IT SEEMS LIKE THERE'S A *GLARING* PROBLEM WITH THIS COURSE OF ACTION.

THERE'S A DECIDEDLY *FATAL* PROBLEM WITH*OUT* THIS COURSE OF ACTION, SO GUESS WHICH ONE I'M DOIN'

SEE, I THINK THESE PROBLEMS ARE RELATED

HEY, THIS WAS THIEF'S IDEA.

AND IF THERE'S ONE THING I KNOW ABOUT THIEF'S IDEAS, IT'S THAT THEY ALWAYS WORK

THIS "THIEF" SOUNDS LIKE AN EXCELLENT FELLOW I WOULDN'T KNOW OF COURSE, AS MY NAME IS LOPEZ AND DEFINITELY NOT THIEF

WELL, *I'M* CONVINCED

I *KNEW* THERE WAS A USE FOR HIS EVIL GENIUS THAT DIDN'T INVOLVE SCREWIN' ME LIKE A TWO-DICKED BILLYGOAT

AKBAR'S

VERY EFFECTIVE WITNESS PROTECTION PROGRAM

(not utterly useless)

MEANWHILE.

DON'T WORRY, ORPHANS. THE GIANT CARGO SHIP FILLED TO ITS SEAMS WITH MEDICINES AND FOOD SHALL BE HERE ANY DAY NOW!

WELL, I ALREADY LOST MY REAL FAMILY AND THEN MY LOVING FOSTER FAMILY TO RANDOM VIOLENCE

SO, STATISTICALLY SPEAKING, NOTHING HORRIBLE COULD HAPPEN TO THAT SHIP

BUT IF IT *DOES*, THEN WE KNOW WHO TO BLAME AND THEREFORE WHO TO KICK OUT

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NOT LONG AGO ..

GET ME OUT OF THAT STINKBOX.

YAR, THAT DO BE AMONGST THE *LEAST* OFFENSIVE MUSKS I'VE EXPERIENCED IN ME LONG PIRATEY CAREER

THAT'S NOT SOMETHING YOU NEED TO BE TELLING US.

WHAT MANNER OF HELL HAVE YOU SEEN, BIKKE?

ALL SORTS. BUT MOSTLY THE VARIETY WHAT DON'T BE KEEN ON PERSONAL HYGIENE

WE'RE ALIVE!

YEAH, NO THANKS TO YOU.

BUT DOUBLE SUPER EXTRA THANKS TO MY COLD FUSION DRIVE THAT KEPT US WARM DURING OUR LONG, GRUELING, STENCH-FILLED TRIP.

THAT'S *WHY* I SAID NO THANKS TO YOU!

IT WAS A GIANT BLOCK OF ICE THAT MADE A TRIP THROUGH ARCTIC WATERS EVEN *COLDER* AND MADE A CRAMPED BOX WITH THREE GUYS WHO HADN'T TAKEN A SHOWER IN WEEKS ALL THE MORE UNBEARABLY *CRAMPED*.

I *STILL* DON'T KNOW HOW WE WENT TO THE BATHROOM.

YE DON'T BE READY FOR THE ULTIMATE SECRETS OF THE SEA!

DO YOU GUYS FIND THAT CONFUSING OR ALARMING?

YES

DOUBLE YES.

'TIS WORSE WHEN YE *KNOW* THE SECRET

YAR

FIRST WE NEED TO FIND OUT WHERE WE ARE.

LET'S SPLIT UP AND DO SOME RECON. REPORT BACK IN AN HOUR.

LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH.

THAT'S THE SPIRIT!

EXCUSE ME, MISS?

DADDY, WHAT'S HAPPENING?

DON'T WORRY, HONEY. IT'S ONE OF THOSE DAMN LARP KIDS.

A PUNCH IN THE NECK WILL SOLVE EVERYTHING.

TELL ME WHERE I AM BEFORE I GROW WEARY OF YOUR CONTINUED EXISTENCE AND SLICE YOU OPEN.

WITH WHAT?

YOUR RAPIER WIT?

WHY DO I KEEP FORGETTING THAT PATHETIC BAG OF HAIR FIGHTER TOOK MY SWORDS?

SAME REASON YOU'RE SAYING THIS OUT LOUD?

EXCUSE ME, COULD YOU—

HEY, YOU'RE THAT GUY

ER?

YOU'RE THE GUY THAT KIDNAPPED THAT GIRL.

THAT'S A FUNNY STORY, ACTUALLY.

HEY, CYNTHIA, C'MERE!

IT'S THE GARBANZO GUY!

THE KIDNAPPER?

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YAR, YOU THAR

ER, UH, I'M SORRY, STRANGER, BUT I DON'T SPEAK ENGLISH.

IF'N YE NO BE TALKIN' THE ENGLISH, THEN HOW IS IT YE TO BE TALKIN' TO THE BIKKE?

WELL, I'D EXPLAIN, BUT AS I SAID I DON'T SPEAK ENGLISH.

WELL PLAYED

YOU THERE, WHOM I CAN'T BE BOTHERED TO ASK TO TURN AROUND.

THAT'S GOOD AS I'M TOO MUCH OF A HIDEOUS NON-ELF HUMAN TO TURN AROUND.

ALSO, I DON'T SPEAK ENGLISH.

BAH! YOU'RE NOT WORTH THE EFFORT OF EXAMINING IN FURTHER DETAIL!

PRITHEE, GOOD SIR I WISH TO KNOW THE NAME OF THIS FINE CITY

WHO WANTS TO KNOW?

THAT DEPENDS ON WHO WANTS TO KNOW WHO WANTS TO KNOW WHAT I WANT TO KNOW

HOLD ON.

LET ME ROLL MY BLUFF SKILL TO SEE IF I CAN LIE TO YOU.

FINE I'M MAKING A MANIPULATION TEST TO SEE IF I WILL BELIEVE YOU.

WHAT'D YOU GET?

I'M CERTAINLY NOT ROLLING MY BLUFF AGAIN TO SEE IF I CAN LIE TO YOU ABOUT MY *OTHER* BLUFF IF THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE ASKING.

HELLO, FELLOW CITIZEN.

HI, I'M FIGHTER!

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YOU THERE!

ER?

I SAY, YOU THERE!

YOU FOOL! DON'T DRAW ATTENTION TO ME I'M ON THE LAM.

LET'S LEAVE LIVESTOCK OUT OF THIS. THE LESS I KNOW ABOUT YOUR *FILTHY* HUMAN MATING RITUALS, THE BETTER I FEEL.

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!

THAT'S WHAT SEPARATES ME FROM PERVERTS SUCH AS YOURSELF.

JUST GO AWAY HE'LL SEE ME!

I THOUGHT YOU FREAKS WOULD BE INTO THAT SORT OF THING.

I FINALLY BUILT A LIFE FOR MYSELF HERE WHY CAN'T I EVER FIND ANY PEACE?

IF I HAD TO GUESS, I'D SAY IT'S BECAUSE EVEN SOCIETIES AS BACKWARDS AS WHAT YOU HUMANS HAVE COBBLED TOGETHER RECOGNIZE THAT IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO SHUN PEOPLE WITH HIDEOUS URGES LIKE YOURS.

THERE YOU ARE!

I FEAR DEATH ONLY SLIGHTLY MORE THAN I HATE MY LIFE!

I CURSE YOU, EBONY STRANGER!

WOULD YOU CARE TO DIVULGE YOUR TEAM'S WEAKNESSES AND SECRETS?

WOULD I!

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THE THING WITH THIEF, SEE, IS THAT HE IS GREED INCARNATE.

I ASKED WHAT IT WAS AND HE SOLD IT TO ME FOR MY BOOK RIGHTS.

AS YOU CAN SEE, IN HIS HASTE TO GRAB UP THE RIGHTS, HE FORGOT ALL ABOUT THE LEFTS. AN EASILY EXPLOITABLE WEAKNESS.

HE CANNOT RESIST THE SEDUCTIVE ALLURE OF WEALTH. I ONCE SAW HIM STEAL SOMETHING THAT WASN'T EVEN THERE.

NOW, I READ LEFT TO RIGHT, SO HE WAS ONLY GETTING *HALF* OF THE TOTAL PACKAGE

PLEASE, GO ON.

PLUS I DIDN'T HAVE ANY BOOKS ON ME AT THE TIME, SO I DIDN'T EVEN HAVE TO PAY HIM RIGHT THEN.

I MEANT ABOUT THE WEAKNESSES, ACTUALLY.

OH, WELL WEAKNESSES ARE BAD

OH! RED MAGE'S GREATEST WEAKNESS IS RED MAGE.

FIGHTER. I MEANT YOUR TEAMMATES.

YOU KNOW THAT SAYING ABOUT TEACHING A MAN HOW TO MAKE A FIRE?

EXCEPT ON BOSSES WHERE YOU HAVE TO SHOOT AT THE CORE 'CAUSE THE REST OF IT IS PURE INVINCIBILITY

IT MAKES YOU WONDER WHY THEY BUILT A CORE AT ALL, GAVE IT NO PROTECTION, AND THEN PUT IT WHERE IT WOULD BE EASILY EXPOSED TO INTERGALACTIC GUNFIRE.

GUYS! I FIGURED OUT A WAY SO WE WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT FREEZING TO DEATH AGAIN FOR AS LONG AS WE LIVE!

BLACK MAGE, WELL, HE'S A NICE GUY, BUT HE'S A CASTER

A PUSH OR A GENTLE BREEZE WILL TAKE HIM RIGHT OUT

AND YOURSELF?

PROBABLY MY NAIVETY

YOU WON'T TELL ANYONE, WILL YOU?

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AND WHAT KIND OF TACTICS DO YOU TEND TO EMPLOY?

OH, WE USUALLY MURDER OUR WAY TO THE TOP AND CLAIM VICTORY WHILST ASTRIDE A PILE OF MANGLED BODIES.

I SEE...

BUT WE'RE HEROES SO IT'S OKAY WHEN *WE* DO THAT

NOW, THIS KILLING, WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE IT AS PRECISE OR STRATEGIC?

IT'S KINDA INDISCRIMINATE, REALLY

GARLAND, - WE'VE BEEN AT - THIS FOR HOURS. THE HUMANS ARE *CLEARLY* TOO STUPID TO DEVISE NAMES FOR THEIR CITIES OR TO SPEAK THEIR OWN LANGUAGE.

- I'LL - BE WITH YOU GUYS IN JUST A MOMENT.

WELL, POO.

AND SO, AT CIRCLE CAVE...

I SENSED YOUR RETURN FROM THE ARCTIC WASTES, AND SUMMONED YOU TO MY SIDE ONCE MORE

YOURS HAS BEEN A PERILOUS AND CONFUSING TREK

HAVE YOU QUESTIONS FOR THE GREAT SAGE?

YEAH. SARDA?

BLACK MAGE HERE.

SINCE YOU CAN DO WHAT YOU *JUST* DID, WHY DIDN'T YOU TAKE US FROM THE ARCTIC WHEN IT WAS GOING TO KILL US BY STARVATION, HYPOTHERMIA, DIMENSIONAL RIFT, AND EXPOSURE ALL AT ONCE?

THE TIME FOR QUESTIONS HAS PASSED.

I TRUST YOU SECURED THE PRECIOUS COLD FUSION REACTOR.

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I TOLD YOU IT WOULD WORK!

I TOLD YOU, I TOLD YOU, I TOLD YOU!

I BUILT IT OUT OF A GIANT BLOCK OF ICE THE THEORY WAS SOUND!

BLOCK OF ICE? NO, I'M AFRAID THAT'S INCREDIBLY STUPID

THE COLD FUSION GENERATOR WAS AN ARTIFACT FROM A LONG FORGOTTEN GOLDEN AGE

IT WAS BURIED UNDER THE ICE. YOU NEEDED IT TO POWER THE SPACE HELICOPTER

BUT HOW WOULD A HELICOPTER WORK IN SPACE ANYWAY?

THE BLADES HAVE TO BE MADE OUT OF ABSOLUTE ZERO CREATED FROM THE FROZEN HEAT OF A COLD FUSION.. Y'KNOW WHAT, FORGET IT

YOU SCREWED UP, SO IT DOESN'T MATTER

WELL, NOW WHAT?

NOW YOU DON'T ATTACK THINGS FROM ORBIT WITH THE ARSENAL OF HEAVEN

AWW MAN!

HEAVEN'S GOT THE BEST WEAPONS.

HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO GET AROUND WITHOUT AN AIRSHIP OR SPACE HELICOPTER?

THOSE ARE PROBABLY THE ONLY MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION OTHER THAN A LAND-BASED SUBMARINE.

DIVE, DIVE!

CAPTAIN? I'D LIKE TO REMIND YOU, AGAIN, THAT WE ARE ON LAND

BLAM BLAM BLAM

THAT'S HOW WE DEAL WITH MUTINY ON THE LANDSUB, CREW.

I'M TOO BUSY SCREWING WITH CAUSALITY TO CHAUFFER YOU JERKS AROUND, BUT I CAN DO SOMETHING FOR YOU..

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SO. YOU SAID SOMETHING ABOUT DOING SOMETHING, BUT ALL I SEE IS A CRAZY OMNIPOTENT OLD MAN MAKING A FUNNY FACE.

SILENCE!

THIS IS THE FACE OF MAGIC!

HOW ELSE SHOULD ONE LOOK WHEN RE-WORKING THE MECHANISMS OF REALITY?

I AIM FOR A *BAD ASS* LOOK, M'SELF

THAT'S WHAT THAT IS?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

IT LOOKS LIKE YOU HAVE GAS.

OH, IT DOES NOT!

OKAY.

NO, YEAH. YOU'RE RIGHT

BAM, THESE CHOWDER HEADS WOULDN'T KNOW BAD ASS IF IT KNEECAPPED THEM

AND BESIDES. ALL THE RICH FOOD WE EAT ON THE ROAD WHO *WOULDN'T* BE A LITTLE GASSY THAT'S WHAT I WANT TO KNOW!

WHAT ARE *YOU* LOOKIN' AT?

DON'T WORRY, BLACK MAGE. I THINK YOU LOOK COOL WHEN YOU DO MAGIC.

WELL. *HOT* DOG.

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WAIT UP, WHITE MAGE! I'VE GOTS SOMETHING TO SHOW YOU!
MY HAMMER OF RIGHTEOUS WRATH + 1 IS AT READY, BLACK MAGE, SO THINK REALLY CAREFULLY...
A PRESENT! I GOTS A PRESENT FOR YOU!
OH, SORRY! THIS - THIS IS SO SWEET. SO THERE IS A VAGUELY HUMAN SIDE TO YOU, AFTER ALL!
IN LIEU OF WORDS, LET THAT LITTLE HEART TELL YOU WHAT I FEEL. IT'S GOTS YOUR INITIALS CARVED INTO IT.
AND MINE.
BLACK MAGE, WHOSE HEART IS THIS?
AWW. DON'T YOU LIKE IT?
GIVE BACK HEART. PLEASE...DYING...
GUESTCOMIC FOR 8BIT- THEATER / WWW.NUKLEARPOWER.COM
FROM WWW.BMOVIECOMIC.COM

AMAZING!
ULTRA RARE!
UNPARALLELED POTION OF ULTIMATE FOX'S CUNNING AND DEVIOUS TREACHERY
+1
AMAZE YOUR RELATIVES!
TRICK YOUR ENEMIES!
FOOL YOUR FRIENDS!
I'LL HAVE THREE OF THOSE!
ONLY ONE PER CUSTOMER!
WHAT??? THEY MUST BE RARER THAN I THOUGHT..
I'LL SHOW YOU CUNNING, HOO-MAN!
ALRIGHT THEN, I'LL TAKE JUST THE ONE AND NOT ANY MORE AT ALL!
HELLO STRANGER!
I WISH TO PURCHASE ONE OF THESE FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME EVER!
GOOD DAY SIR!
I'D LIKE TO PURCHASE MY VERY FIRST ONE OF THESE... AGAIN.
KLPO
SUCKER!
ZZZIP!
GUEST STRIP BY GUSTAVO HERODIER 2004
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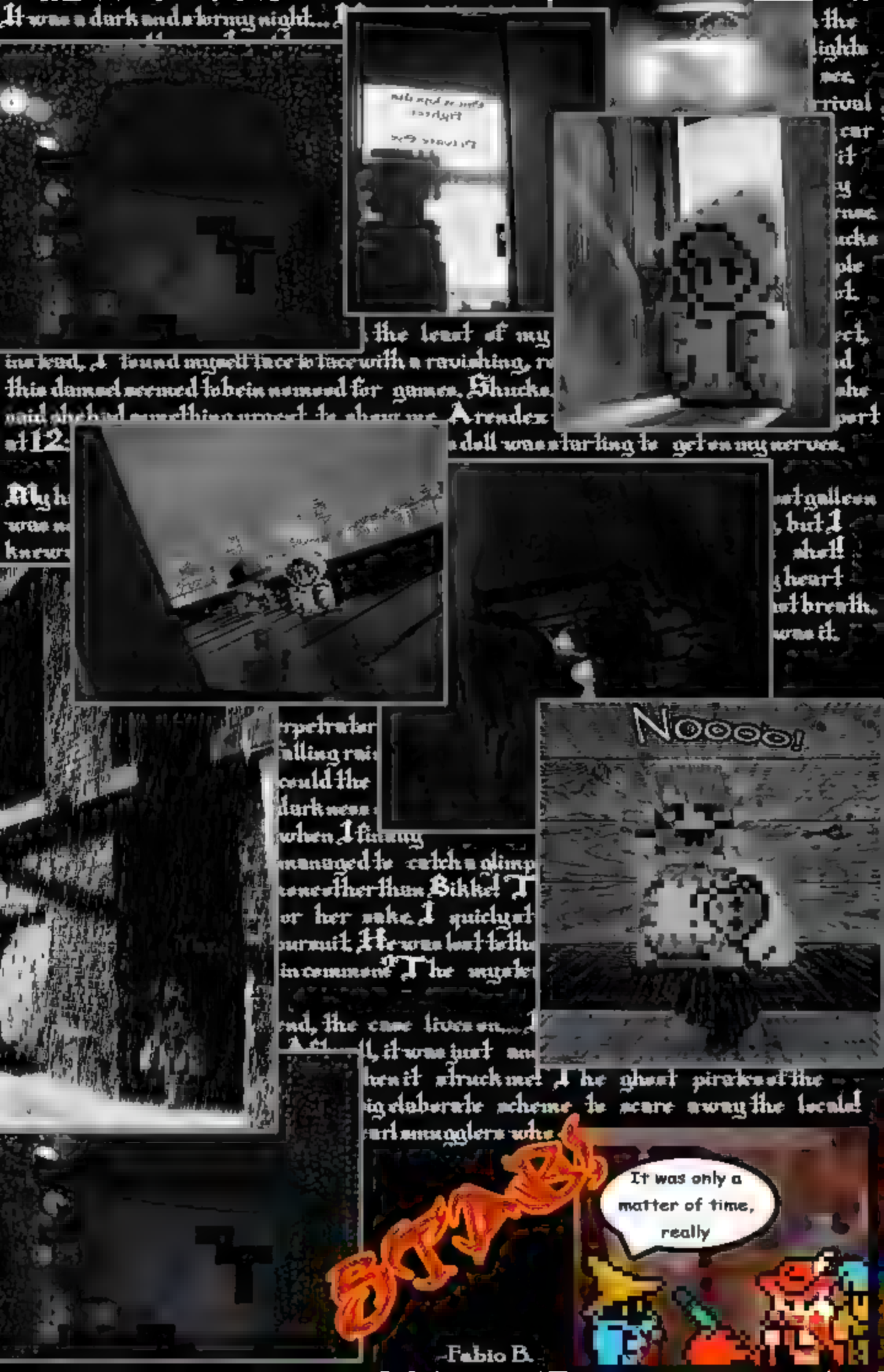
Noooo!
It was only a matter of time, really
Fabio B.

WE FIND OUR BAND OF HEARTLESS KILLERS---I MEAN, HEROES IN THE MIDDLE OF A GRAVEYARD

SO YOU SEE, ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS BURN THESE LITTLE BLADES OF GRASS

WHISTLING NOISES

THEIR DEATHS WILL BE ENOUGH TO JUMPSTART BLACK MAGE'S HADOKEN, WHICH WE CAN USE TO SHOOT THAT TOWER..

...WITH THE BELL THAT WILL ROLL DOWN THE HILL AND DESTROY THE ORPHANAGE..

Happy Face ORPHANAGE

DON'T WORRY EXPLODING IS GOOD FOR YOU OKAY? :D

...SENDING SHARDS OF CEMENT AND ORGANS INTO THE WAREHOUSE.

THE CEMENT WILL DEMOLISH A HOLE IN THE SIDEWALL THAT WE CAN EASILY USE TO TAKE THE ORGAN-SOAKED WHEELBARROWS OUT OF THE WAREHOUSE, AND SELL THEM TO THE HOSPITAL, SO THAT WE AT LONG LAST WILL FINALLY HAVE CASH!

COLD, HARD, SPENDABLE CASH!

THAT HAS TO BE THE DUMBEST THING I'VE EVER HEARD

USUALLY I'D AGREE, BUT THIS ONE'S GOT GORE. PLUS I GET TO BURN THINGS AND CAUSE STUFF

NO I MEAN THE BIT WITH YOU THREE AND THE MONEY.

THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.

HI GUYS!

GASP!

BLACK BELT! IT SURE HAS BEEN A WHILE, HASN'T IT?

I COULDN'T SWORN YOU WERE DEAD

I STILL AM, 'CEPT NOWADAYS I GET TO ROCK OUT AS A ZOMBIE.

WHOA!

WAIT A SECONN YOU'RE STILL IN ONE PIECE

YEAH, I KNOW!

BUT XARY CUT YOU UP

YEAH, I KNOW!

THE VOLCANO EXPLODED AND YOU WERE BLASTED TO SMITHEREENS.

YEAH, I KNOW!

IT'S ALL MY FAULT...

IT'S ALL MY FAULT...

IT'S ALL MY FAULT!

YOU WERE PRACTICALLY CREMATED

SCATTERED ACROSS THE LAND IN A CIRCULAR MANNER.

ANY ASHES WE FOUND WERE THROWN OFF A DAMN CLIFF.

SO NOW, IN THE NING HIDEOUSLY BURNING DEPTHS OF HELL, ARE YOU STANDING HERE NOW?

BLACK BELT?

SPLODE!

OH HEY! ORGANS!

I'M SO OVER THIS, NOW.

RED MAGE? WHY ARE YOU FOLLOWING ME AROUND?
DON'T PLAY DUMB, SARDA. I'M GAINING EXPERIENCE!
ALTERNATIVE SYSTEMS USE NON-MURDER-BASED METHODS OF GAINING EXPERIENCE, LIKE READING A BOOK OR BEING TRAINED BY A MASTER.
YOU'RE POWERFUL ENOUGH TO CONTROL REALITY! I FIGURE IF I HANG AROUND YOU LONG ENOUGH, I'M BOUND TO GET SOME MAJOR EXPERIENCE!
YOU KNOW WHAT, RED MAGE? YOU'RE RIGHT. IN FACT, THIS JUST ARRIVED FOR YOU. YOU'VE EARNED IT.
WOW! A PHYSICAL MANIFESTATION OF EXPERIENCE POINTS! ALL FOR ME!
YES, RED MAGE. IT'S YOUR VERY OWN REALITY CHECK.
guest comic by Mookie
www.dominic-deegan.com

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I JUST DOCTOR, I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO ANY MORE!

THEY'RE DRIVING ME TO DISTRACTION!

MMHMM I SEE.

"IT'S LIKE HAVING A BUNCH OF MORALLY CORRUPT, MURDEROUS IDIOT-CHILDREN!"

SHE'S MINE I SAW HER FIRST AND I'M CHARGING ALL OF YOU FILTHY NON-ELVES A 10000% INTEREST RATE FOR PARTAKING OF HER MOTHERHOOD

WOOHOO! CHECK OUT THOSE BAZONGAS! I MEAN. DAMN WOMAN.

BM WAS RIGHT RUNNING WITH SCISSORS IS FUN!

AND I'M CHARGING YOU DOUBLE FOR THE HONOR OF BEING MY MOTHER

I FEEL PRETTY

AND ZIS PRESSURE? HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL?

VAT KINDS OF DREAMS HAFF YOU BEEN HAFFING LATELY, MM?

WELL, I DID HAVE THIS ONE DREAM THE OTHER NIGHT

HEY BABY, LOOKIN' GOOD!

AND BY "GOOD", I MEAN "YOUR BOOBS"

WINK

RRRAAAAAuuuuuuuGGHHH

EEP

HEY WHITE MAGE! HEY, WHITE MAGE! HEY WHITE MAGE! HEY, WHITE MAGE! HEY, WHITE MAGE.

HEY WHITE MAGE, GUESS WHAT?

GUESS WHAT'S FUN, WHITE MAGE?

I'M CALLING MY LAWYERS

THIS IS A VIOLATION OF YOUR CONTRAAAAAAACT!

HEHE

EHEHEH

NOOOOO! I'M TOO BRILLIANT TO DIE!

AAAAAHAHAHAHAAAAA!

HAHAHAHAHAAAA!!

HA HA

HEH

HEH HEH

TWITCH

TWITCH

HEH

WAAAAAHAHAHAHAHAAAA!!!

DOES THIS MAKE ME A BAD PERSON?

AND AFTERWARD, I FELT THE MOST PROFOUND SENSE OF PEACE AND WELL-BEING, AS IF ALL WAS RIGHT WITH THE WORLD

ARE YOU SURE ZAT YOU DO NOT HAFF ANY REPRESSED SEXUAL ANXIETIES?

WINK

END

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I CAN'T WAIT UNTIL WE GET TO THE TEMPLE OF FIENDS. I'LL BET GARLAND HAS ABOUT A *MILLION* SWORDS.

KEEP UP THIS INCESSANT RAMBLING, AND THEY'LL ALL BE PENETRATING YOUR LARYNX SHORTLY FOLLOWING OUR ARRIVAL.

CAN YOU IMAGINE? HE'D NEED TO HAVE LIKE A HUNDRED ARMS JUST TO HOLD THEM ALL!

HALT! READY YOUR WEAPONS, FELLOW WARRIORS WE ARE ABOUT TO FACE THE WRATH OF

A MADPONY!

UMM. YOU'RE SURE THAT'S NOT JUST A REGULAR HORSE?

NONSENSE! SAYS RIGHT HERE: MADPONY, 64 HP, 10 STR 53 EXP

I DON'T WANT TO HURT THE LITTLE HORSIE

PANSY

FIGHTER! USE YOUR SWORDS!

BLACK MAGE! FIR2!

SWORDS!? I'D LOVE TO!

EXCELLENT

THIEF! UMM. STEAL IT'S HORSE SHOES, OR SOMETHING.

"SIGH"

63 EXP, HERE I COME

SLASH

SLASH

JOB'S FINISHED

ODD . NO CHANGE IN EXP ON MY CHARACTER SHEET

?

WUT IN TARNATION 'AV Y'ALL GONE DONE TA MAH HORSE, GOSH DERNIT!?

RUN AWAY!

SOME TIME LATER

SO, FIGHTER HAVING AVERTED THE FARMER'S IMPENDING WRATH, WOULD YOU CARE TO DISCUSS THE FUTURE OWNERSHIP OF HIS RIGHT BOOT?

WOULD I EVER!

YOU DO REALIZE THAT THAT'S YOUR LEFT FOOT

CUT THE SMALL TALK, GUYS I THINK JUST SPOTTED A MANTICOR

MEW!

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YOU SHOULD REALLY THINK ABOUT GROWING A MUSTACHE, SARDA.

A MUSTACHE?

NO, I'VE GOT THE WRONG FACE FOR IT

IT'D ADD THAT EXTRA SOMETHING TO THE WHOLE "SAGE" LOOK YOU HAVE GOING ON.

I NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT IT LIKE THAT

Y'KNOW, IT'S BEEN FUN WITNESSING THE BIRTH OF CREATION AND ALL, BUT I WISH I COULD GO BACK TO MY OWN TIME.

AS YOU HAVE WILLED IT, SO IT SHALL BE.

ISN'T THAT CONVENIENT

WELL IT CERTAINLY BEATS USING THE LAST OF YOUR MAGICAL ENERGIES TO GET HERE FOUR SECONDS TOO LATE TO PUT YOUR ULTIMATE PLAN INTO MOTION SO YOU'RE STRANDED BECAUSE THE UNIVERSE OBEYS SOMEONE ELSE'S ORDERS.

WHAT? I CAN'T HEAR YOU OVER BEING REORGANIZED INTO THE TIME STREAM.

MUSTACHE, HUH?

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CAN IT BE? DID I MAKE IT BACK?

LOOKS LIKE IT

SARDA!

I SEE YOU LIKED MY MUSTACHE IDEA AFTER ALL.

WELL, I'VE GROWN A MUSTACHE.

THAT'S TWO WEEKS DOWN. JUST 14 BILLION YEARS TO GO.

WISH I HAD A DECK OF CARDS.

WHAT THE..?

WHERE'S ALL THIS DUST COMING FROM? DON'T TELL ME

PROTO-STELLAR DUST CLOUD?

IS THIS *YOUR* MESS ON MY LAWN?

I TOLD YOU A *BILLION* YEARS AGO TO STOP ATTRACTING SO MUCH PARTICULATE MATTER

SOME TIME LATER..

EVEN LATER

LOUSY INTERSTELLAR DUST

I WISH IT WOULD STOP CLUMPING UP ALL OVER ME.

THAT'S *JUST* WHAT I NEED

SOME JACKASS BLARING ELECTROMAGNETIC RADIATION AT ALL HOURS OF THE DAY

AND, AM I CRAZY, OR HAS IT BEEN GETTING INCREMENTALLY DENSER?

WAY, WAY *WAY* LATER

WATCHING ALL THOSE DUST IMMIGRANTS RUN DOWN THE PROPERTY VALUE OF THIS NEIGHBORHOOD WAS ONE THING, BUT YOU MOLTEN LAVA KIDS HAVE *GOT* TO GO.

LATER STILL

UNTIL FINALLY, ABOUT ONE BILLION YEARS AGO

I'VE JUST GOT TO FIND THAT WHITE MAGE AND OCCUPY HER WITH SOME NONSENSE QUEST SO SHE DOESN'T SOMEHOW END UP AT THE BEGINNING OF TIME.

OH! I'LL PUT HER IN A POCKET DIMENSION IF SHE EVER GETS UPPITY

AT LAST, A NICE CAVE ALL TO MYSELF.

THAT WASN'T SO BAD. I'M HARDLY INSANE AT ALL FROM THE AEONS OF ISOLATION AND BLIND, *SEETHING* [illegible]

SARDA?

I'M SORRY. I WAS JUST THINKING ABOUT HOW MUCH I LOVE MY MUS-TACHE.

SO WHERE DID THE LIGHT WARRIORS GO?

THEY SHOULD BE OUTSIDE ENJOYING THEIR LATEST GIFT

TEN MINUTES AGO.

IT IS DONE. YOUR NEW MODUS TRANSPORTI IS OUTSIDE.

AS A SIGN OF THANKS, I'M NOT GOING TO CALL YOU ON THAT RIDICULOUS NON-PHRASE.

THANK YOU. THAT'LL SAVE ME THE EFFORT OF DISASSOCIATING YOUR BONES FROM YOUR BODY

LIKE THIS ONE.

LOOKS KINDA IMPORTANT

I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE THAT TRANSPORTA MODI!

THAT'S NOT WHAT IT'S--

FASTER, YOU FOOLS!

IT'S SO GOOD OF YOU TO HELP.

THIS QUEST TO SAVE THE WORLD FROM THE COMING TIDE OF DARKNESS MIGHT NEVER HAVE GOTTEN OFF THE GROUND WERE IT NOT FOR YOUR EFFORTS.

YEA, IS IT NOT WRITTEN "WITH GREAT POWER COMES GREAT AUTHORITY, BUT ABSOLUTE POWER ROCKS ABSOLUTE-LY"?

I.. WASN'T AWARE OF THAT ***PARTICULAR*** AXIOM.

IT SEEMS ABSOLUTE POWER ISN'T ***QUITE*** ENOUGH TO FIND A WILLING PUBLISHER.

THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT THIS "NEW" AIRSHIP THAT FILLS ME WITH EQUAL PARTS DREAD AND RAGE.

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SEE, STUFF LIKE *THIS* IS WHY I THINK SARDA SECRETLY HATES US.

IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE A SECRET NOW?

I'LL NOT HAVE YOU TWO BESMIRCH THE GOOD NAME OF A RELIABLE MISSION CONTACT

IT DOESN'T BOTHER YOU THAT THE MISSIONS IN QUESTION ARE UNDENIABLY SUICIDAL?

THEY CAN'T BE *TOO* SUICIDAL IF WE KEEP LIVING THROUGH THEM.

LET'S BE HONEST WITH OURSELVES FOR A MOMENT

SARDA HAS ALWAYS HAD EVERY REASON TO EXPECT US TO DIE

OUR SURVIVAL THUS FAR CANNOT BE ATTRIBUTED TO OUR OWN COMPETENCE

NO WAY

WHEN I WAS SWORD FIGHTING KARY, SHE WAS ALL "VOOOM, VONG" AND I WAS "KSSSHHH! ZWONG, WWONG— SPANG!"

FIGHTER, YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT STAR WARS AGAIN.

ALSO, "*SPANG*"?

I THINK FIGHTER'S *POINT* IS THAT, YES, WE'VE ENCOUNTERED INCREDIBLY DANGEROUS SITUATIONS. AND, YES, SOME OF THOSE ARE DUE TO SARDA'S GUIDANCE. BUT WE'VE ALWAYS SHOWN OUR TRUE COLORS IN THE FACE OF THAT ADVERSITY AND RISEN VICTORIOUS LIKE TRUE HEROES.

LIKE HE'S TESTING US TO MAKE US *EARN* THE POWER WE'LL NEED IF WE'RE TO SAVE THE WORLD FROM CHAOS.

THANKS, RM, BUT I CAN EXPLAIN MY OWN POINTS.

THE "SPANG" IS WHEN I BLOCKED HER BLASTER SHOT

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OKAY, RED MAGE FAKE A PILOTING SKILL AND GET US OUT OF HERE.

BUT SARDA HASN'T GIVEN US OUR NEXT QUEST YET

ALL THE MORE REASON TO BE QUICK ABOUT IT.

I'M NOT GOING *ANYWHERE* UNTIL MR QUEST LOG SAYS IT'S TIME TO GO.

IS THAT A FACT...

WHY DON'T YOU LOOK AT BLACK MAGE FOR A WHILE.

I CERTAINLY DON'T SEE ANYTHING EXPLOITABLE ABOUT DOING THAT

YOINK

Quest Log

All

THE MORNING

ICY BOWELS OF THE EARTH

RE-ESTABLISH SELF IN SPACE-TIME

DEFEAT FORCES OF EVIL

COLD FUSION

DESCRIPTION

IN THE PANTRY NORTH OF THE OVEN THERE

F COMPONENTS FOR A HEALTHY MEAL. FIND

TAKE THEM TO THE KITCHEN

THE WEST OF THE ROOM.

MILK IN A

EWACK!

A) THAT WAS AWESOME

BUT B) WHO'S GOING TO FLY THIS THING?

I DECIDED THAT'S *YOUR* RESPONSIBILITY

WHEN?

OH, ABOUT MID-[redacted].

LET'S DISCUSS IT AFTER SOME LUNCH.

LAUNCH

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URGH.

WHAT HAPPENED? IT FEELS LIKE I'VE SUFFERED BLUNT TRAUMA TO THE HEAD

NO ONE CRACKED YOUR SKULL WITH A HUGE BOOK IF THAT'S WHAT YOU ARE ASKING ME.

WHAT BLACK MAGE MEANT TO SAY WAS THAT YOU SINGLE-HANDEDLY FOUGHT AN AMBUSH OF... UH...

BAD GUYS.

...

YEAH. "BAD GUYS."

I DON'T *REMEMBER* DOING IT.

EXPERIENCE OVERLOAD

RIGHT!

YOU LET OUT A BARBARIC HOWL OF "DING" WHILE THE BLOOD OF YOUR FOES WAS STI... SPLATTERED ACROSS YOUR FACE AND STEAMING. ER, AND THEN YOU FAINTED

WELL.

THAT SOUNDS LIKE ME.

BUT THAT DOESN'T EXPLAIN WHY WE'RE FLYING NOW.

THAT'S A FUNNY STORY

LIGHT WARRIORS! LIGHT WARRIORS! THIS IS SARDA.

THERE IS NO ESCAPE!

HE SURVEYS THE WIDTH AND BREADTH OF CREATION WITH HIS ALL-SEEING EYES!

EVEN NOW, HE PROJECTS HIS CONSCIOUSNESS INTO OUR PUNY MINDS!

IT'S CALLED "A RADIO"

YOU MUST NOW TRAVEL TO THE ISLES OF CARDIA.

WAIT, WAIT. WAIT HOLD THE PHONE

RADIO

WHATEVER.

CARDIA IS A DEN OF DRAGONS.

BAH.

I DON'T BELIEVE IN DRAGONS. THEY'RE NOTHING MORE THAN THE EXTERNALIZATION OF A SOCIETY'S FEARS.

THESE PHANTOMS ARE NOTHING BUT A WAY FOR UNJUST RULERS TO TURN A POPULATION AGAINST ITS OWN INTERESTS.

TO CONVINCE THEM THEIR SAFETY FROM NONEXISTENT THREATS IS A GREATER CONCERN THAN THEIR LIBERTY. IT WORKS IN ELF LAND

BUT YOU'VE ***SEEN*** DRAGONS. ONE MADE OUT OF FIRE ***ATE*** RED MAGE.

YEAH, ***OTHER*** THAN THE REAL ONES, I DON'T BELIEVE IN DRAGONS.

STILL, BLACK MAGE RAISES AN EXCELLENT POINT. WE'RE EDIBLE.

THAT'S PRETTY ROTTEN MOTIVATION FOR US TO GO THERE.

I COULD SAY IT'S YOUR DESTINY. THAT THE FATE OF THE ***WORLD*** IS WRITTEN WITH YOUR EVERY DEED.

OR I COULD INFORM YOU THAT THE SHIP IS ON AUTOPILOT AND I'LL FILL YOUR LUNGS WITH TAFFY IF YOU MESS WITH IT.

WELL, IF YOU'RE GOING TO PUT IT THAT WAY

HE HAS A WAY WITH WORDS.

I ALWAYS WANTED TO DIE IN CARDIA.

YOU KNOW WHAT I HEARD?

FREE TAFFY!

AUTOPILOT SHUT OFF VALVE (BUTTON)

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GUYS, I'VE GOT SOME HORRIBLE NEWS. THE FREE TAFFY BUTTON DOESN'T SEEM TO WORK

WHAT'S HE TALKING ABOUT?

YOU SHOULD BE APPROACHING THE LANDING ZONE NOW.

THERE IS ONE PROBLEM NAMELY--

HOLD IT, SARDA.

WE WERE PROMISED AGONIZING, TAFFY-RELATED DEMISES IF ANYONE SCREWED WITH THE AUTO-PILOT

HOW DO YOU EXPECT YOUR THREATS OF RIDICULOUS YET EXCRUCIATING DEATH TO HOLD ANY MEANING WITH US IF YOU DON'T FOLLOW THROUGH? HMMM?

REALLY, THIEF, THERE'S NO NEED TO ANTAGONIZE SARDA OVER SUCH A TRIFLE.

HE'S A VERY BUSY WIZARD

I WAS GOING TO SAY IT WAS MY ASSUMPTION THAT LANDING WITHOUT THE AUTOPILOT WOULD BE PUNISHMENT ENOUGH FOR YOUR INDISCRETIONS.

BUT IF YOU INSIST

GRUNDLE

KAKOLE

WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT THE AUTOPILOT?

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CRASH!

WELL, THAT WAS ONE OF OUR BETTER LANDINGS.

EWW! CHECK OUT WHAT BLACK MAGE *HORKED* ALL OVER THE CONTROL PANEL!

I THINK THE CRASH SQUEEZED IT OUT OF H(M.

WOW

THERE ARE MONSTERS MADE OF SLIME THAT WISH THEY LOOKED AS HORRIBLE AS THAT

IT DOES NOT HAVE THE MOST REFRESHING ODOR IN THE WORLD.

THAT'S LUNG-TAFFY COVERED IN MUCOUS.

DAISIES, IT AIN'T

HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO FLY THIS THING OUT OF HERE? I'M NOT TOUCHING ANYTHING WITH THAT CRAP ON IT

BUT MAYBE YOU GUYS ARE CONTRACTUALLY BOUND TO DO IT...

OH, GOOD LORD NO.

ER, I MEAN...

WE SHOULD HEAD OUT BLACK MAGE CAN BURN THAT GUNK OFF WHEN HE RECOVERS.

ARE YOU SURE HE'LL BE OKAY?

SEE? GOOD AS NEW!

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HAVE YOU LANDED?

MAYBE WE DIDN'T PUT OUR SEATS IN THEIR FULL UP-RIGHT AND LOCKED POSITIONS, BUT WE STOPPED MOVING AND LIVED TO TALK ABOUT IT

EXCELLENT

WAIT YOU LIVED THROUGH IT?

SOME MORE THAN OTHERS.

BAH.

THAT MEANS THIS NECROPHONE'S A PIECE OF JUNK

SORRY TO DISAPPOINT

OH, IT'S FINE, I'VE COME TO EXPECT DISAPPOINTMENT FROM YOU GUYS. BUT YOU CAN FULFILL A SECONDARY PURPOSE FOR ME WHILE YOU'RE THERE IN CARDIA.

ANYTHING TO HELP!

THE ONLY TIMES YOU SAY WHAT I'M THINKING, IT'S WITH-OUT ANY OF THE SARCASM AND THEREFORE THE EXACT OPPOSITE OF WHAT I MEAN

MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE THE ONLY TIMES I'M ***NOT*** THINKING WHAT IT IS YOU AREN'T SAYING IS WHEN ***YOU'RE*** THINKING BUT ***I'M*** TALKING.

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

I HAVE ***NO IDEA.***

..AND THAT'S YOUR MISSION

SARDA? JUST A SUGGESTION.

WE COULD STRAP DYNAMITE TO OUR HEADS AND ROLL AROUND IN FIRE.

IT WOULD INCREASE OUR CHANCES OF SURVIVAL.

YEAH, SURE, WHY NOT

I HAVE DOUBTS THAT HE'S LISTENING TO US.

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WAIT, I DON'T GET IT

ME NEITHER, REALLY

SO WE'RE JUST SUPPOSED TO WALK INTO THE FABLED RUINS OF THE DRAGON EMPIRE?

YUP

FIND THEIR GODKING?

YUP

SARDA SAID THE DRAGONS WOULD KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH US FROM THERE.

AND STRIKE UP A CONVERSATION?

YUP

I KNOW

THAT'S WHAT WORRIES ME.

OH, THERE'S NOTHING TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT

YET WE HAVE NO RECORDS THAT ANYTHING LIKE AN ANCIENT KINGDOM OF DRAGONS EVER EXISTED

THE ELVEN EMPIRE IS THE OLDEST IN THE WORLD, RIGHT?

AND DO YOU SEE ANY RUINS OUT HERE? 'CAUSE I DON'T

THE DRAGON EMPIRE IS JUST SOME GOOFY MYTH.

YEAH, WE DEFINITELY LOST FIGHTER.

THERE IS A GOD!

AND HIS NAME BE AWESOME THE MIGHTY!

CO-INCIDENTALLY, I FOUND A HOLE THAT WASN'T HERE WHEN WE PASSED THE FIRST TIME.

ALSO, IT SEEMS THAT FIGHTER'S TRACKS *END* AT THE HOLE.

WELL, I'M SURE HE'S GONE TO A BETTER PLACE. HOPEFULLY AT *TERRIFIC* SPEED THAT CAME TO AN ABRUPT END AT THE LAST SECOND.

HEY GUYS!

HEY GUYS.

HEY GUYS.

YES, HE'S GONE NOW.

AND *NO* AMOUNT OF PAYING ATTENTION TO DISEMBODIED VOICES FROM UNDERGROUND WILL BRING HIM BACK.

I'M DOWN HERE!

I'M DOWN HERE!

I'M DOWN HERE!

THE WORST PART WILL BE LINGERING HERE, WONDERING IF HE'S ALIVE OR DEAD SO LET'S GO.

I'M FINE!

I'M FINE!

I'M FINE!

FIGHTER, DON'T MOVE.

'KAY

'KAY

'KAY

CAREFUL, THIEF

YOU DON'T WANT TO FALL IN TOO.

IF WE DON'T LEAVE YOU MIGHT GET "ACCIDENTALLY" PUSHED.

PERHAPS I HAVEN'T REMINDED YOU OF MY NATURAL ELVEN SUPERIORITY IN THE LAST FIVE MINUTES. LET ME ASSURE YOU IT INCLUDES ALL MATTERS OF DEXTERITY

I'M NOT SAYING I COULD DODGE ARROWS. I'M SAYING I WOULDN'T *HAVE* TO.

'CAUSE I'D STEAL THEM REAL FAST WTIH MY DEXTERITY, SEE?

I AM IN LESS DANGER OF FALLING INTO THIS HOLE THAN YOU.

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ARE YOU OKAY?

YEAH. I LANDED ON SOMETHING SOFT AND RED MAGE-SHAPED.

I THINK IT WAS A PI...OW

YOU'RE STANDING ON MY KIDNEYS.

OH, HEY

THAT WOULD EXPLAIN WHY YOU SHRIEKED IN PAIN WHEN I LANDED ON THAT PILLOW.

AND WHY IT WAS FI...ED WITH BONES.

IT'S FINE. LET'S JUST SAY I "FORGOT" TO RECORD THE DAMAGE.

AND THAT *WORKS*?

THE THEORY IS SOUND.

SHOULD YOUR NECK BE TWISTED AROUND QUITE THAT MUCH?

I SAID THE THEORY WAS *SOUND*. I DIDN'T SAY IT WAS A *GOOD* THEORY

BLACK MAGE!

BLACK MAGE!

BLACK MAGE!

FIGHTER?

IS THAT YOU?

NO, I AM TOTALLY SOME OTHER DUDE.

NO, I AM TOTALLY SOME OTHER DUDE.

NO, I AM TOTALLY SOME OTHER DUDE

BUT THIS FIGHTER SOUNDS REALLY COOL.

BUT THIS FIGHTER SOUNDS REALLY COOL.

BUT THIS FIGHTER SOUNDS REALLY COOL

AND PROBABLY HANDSOME LIKE REALLY HAND-SOME.

AND PROBABLY HANDSOME. LIKE REALLY HAND-SOME.

AND PROBABLY HANDSOME LIKE REALLY HAND SOME

I BET HE'S SMART AS A SWORD — THAT'S TWICE AS SMART AS A WHIP, BY THE WAY

I BET HE'S SMART AS A SWORD — THAT'S TWICE AS SMART AS A WHIP, BY THE WAY

...MART AS ...D — THAT'S ...S SMART AS ...P, BY THE WAY

YOU KNOW WE CAN SEE YOU FROM HERE.

NUTS.

NUTS.

NUTS.

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SO WHAT'S UP?

SO WHAT'S UP?

SO WHAT'S UP?

DOING WHAT?

DOING WHAT?

STOP DOING THAT

DOING WHAT?

THERE IS NO ECHO IN HERE!

ARE YOU SURE? I COULDN'T TELL.

SO I FIGURED I SHOULD DO ONE JUST IN CASE.

WOW YOU'VE FINALLY DONE IT. MY HATRED OF YOU HAS SURPASSED THE ABILITY OF ALL EXISTING WORDS TO COMMUNICATE IT

RED MAGE, SUGGESTIONS?

HATERIFFIC, MEGANGER, ANATHEMALICE, RAGENOMIC, OMNILOATHE, ARMORRHATION.

THAT WILL SUFFICE, THANKS.

I COULD GO ON.

I CHOOSE OMNILOATHE.

omniloathe
v find repugnant in all possible ways, conditions, and variances
"All Communists omniloathe joy."

AWE-SOME. WE'VE GOT BEST BUDDY CODEWORDS NOW!

NO. WE HAVEN'T

SURE WE DO. YOU'RE, UM.

FRIENDLICIOUS!

YES, I CAN SEE IT WAS THE ACME OF WISDOM TO TEAM UP WITH THIS CREW

IT WOULD BE A SHAME IF MY KNIFE FELL INTO YOU 30 TIMES

COME HERE

WHATEVER YOU SAY

THAT'S NOT A VERY PALORAMIC VIEW

ULTRABUDDY

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GOT A PLAN TO GET OUT OF THERE YET?

THIS MAY BE MY REDUCED INTELLIGENCE FROM LISTENING TO FIGHTER'S TREATISE ON "FRIENDRADERIE" TALKING, BUT THE SIMPLER SCENARIO IS TO DRAG THIEF DOWN HERE WITH US.

WE'VE BEEN DOING IT *THIS* LONG, SO WHY STOP NOW?

THIEF! JOIN US IN THE CAVEPANION!

YEAH, MY PLAN INVOLVED GETTING **OFF** THIS GODSFORSAKEN ISLAND

SO I WON'T BE DOING THAT

C'MON, THIEF. ALL THE COOL KIDS ARE DOING IT!

COOL KIDS?

ARE THEY GOING TO PANTS ME? GIVE ME A WEDGIE? MAKE FUN OF MY JEANS? WHAT IS THEIR OBSESSION WITH MY PANTS!

MY BATHING SUIT AREA IS NOT FOR TOUCHING!

I'VE BEEN THINKING. MAYBE WE CAN GET OUT OF HERE AND LEAVE RED MAGE BEHIND. IT'S THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS.

SECRETLY, I INTEND TO LEAVE FIGHTER BEHIND AS WELL.

YOUR SECRET'S SAFE WITH ME, BLACK MAGE!

QUICKLY, THIEF!

THIEF?

YOU THINK HE'S GONE?

ELVES ARE DICKS!

YUP, HE'S GONE.

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SO IT'S AGREED

IN OUR NEW, UNDERGROUND SOCIETY, RED MAGE WILL COMPRISE THE INTELLECTUAL ELITE, FIGHTER WILL BE THE SLAVE POPULATION, AND I WILL BE THE TYRANNICAL RULING CLASS.

MY FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS IS TO GET SOME CHICKS DOWN HERE SO WE CAN POPULATE OUR UTOPIAN CAVE NATION AND WAGE WAR WITH THE UP-WORLDERS

AHEM.

WHO DARES AWAKEN THE DRAGON LORD BAHAMUT!

UM. HE DID IT

YOU, WHO ARE BUT AN INSECT TO THE GREAT GOD BAHAMUT?

YOU INTERRUPTED MY TIMELESS SLEEP OF AGES --

-- WHEREIN I AWAIT THE GREATEST BATTLE OF GOOD AND EVIL FOR THE FACE OF THE WORLD --

UHAVE TO CALL FORTH A PATHETIC SLUR AGAINST THE WORTHLESS ELVEN RACE?

YEAH, SURE WHAT UR?

THEN YOU MUST BE THE ENLIGHTENED WARRIOR.

COOL

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WAIT, WAIT, HOLD IT.

YOU WOULD SPEAK TO THE GREAT GOD BAHAAMUT WITHOUT HE SPEAKING TO YOU FIRST?

STAND ASIDE, OH ENLIGHTENED WARRIOR, SO THAT I MAY UNMAKE THEM.

"THEM"? I'M JUST STANDING HERE.

HOW UNFORTUNATE FOR YOU.

OH, DON'T WORRY ABOUT THEM, THEY'RE WITH ME.

THESE MUST BE THE DARK TIMES IF SLAVES ARE SO BOLD.

SLAVES?

YEAH, BUT I LIKE 'EM.

AT EXACTLY WHAT POINT DID WE LOSE CONTROL OF THIS SITUATION?

SILENCE, RED SLAVE

WAIT SO DOES THAT MAKE ME BLACK SLA—

GOOD NIGHT, EVERYBODY!

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FIRST OF ALL, I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR AGREEING TO ADOPT A FORM THAT WON'T DRIVE US MAD WITH A BEAUTY OUR MERELY MORTAL MINDS COULD NEVER HOPE TO BEHOLD.

THOUGH I AM THE GREAT DRAGON GOD KING, I AM VERSED IN THE MANIFOLD WEAKNESSES OF THINGS SUCH AS YOURSELVES.

THAT'S NICE OF YOU.

I KNOW.

OH, GREAT DRAGON KING--

GOD.

RIGHT UM. WHAT'S ALL THIS TALK ABOUT SO-CALLED ENLIGHTENED WARRIORS?

SO IT IS WRITTEN UPON THE STARS OF THE SKY, THE BRANCHES OF THE FOREST, YEA, EVEN UNTO THE WAVES OF THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS CREATION, THERE WILL COME A DARK TIME.

THE SLUMBERING GREAT DRAGON GOD--

KING.

RIGHT. HE WILL AWAKEN IN [redacted] AND HE WILL ANOINT THE ENLIGHTENED WARRIOR WHO WILL DRIVE THE DARKNESS BACK FROM WHENCE IT CAME.

SUPER GUY

HOW ABOUT "LIGHT WARRIORS" ANY LEGENDS ABOUT THEM?

NEVER HEARD OF THEM.

IN THAT CASE, IT MAY INTEREST YOU TO KNOW THAT THERE ARE, IN FACT, FOUR OF THESE ENLIGHTENED [redacted].

WOW, REALLY? DO WE KNOW ANY OF THEM?

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ENOUGH.

THE TEST OF COURAGE WILL DETERMINE THE TRUE IDENTITY OF THE ENLIGHTENED WARRIOR.

THIS ISN'T SOME INSIPID QUEST WROUGHT WITH DANGER IS IT?

FAR FROM IT.

OH GOOD

IT IS THE ULTIMATE QUEST.

THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY.

I THINK YOU'RE CONFUSED ABOUT WHAT "INSIPID" MEANS.

AND THE UNTOLD POWER THAT COMES WITH SELF-REALIZA-TION."

DID I SAY INSIPID? 'CAUSE I MEANT TO SAY *LET'S GO.*

"YOU MUST BRING UNTO ME THE TAIL OF A RAT."

MR. BAHAMUT? SIR?

I'M SOMETHING OF A QUEST AFICIONADO. AND I GOTTA SAY, THIS WHOLE RAT TAIL THING?

YEAH, IT DOESN'T REALLY MAKE ***ANY*** SENSE GIVEN THE SELF-DISCOVERY ANGLE OF THIS QUEST'S DESCRIP-TION. HOW IS A RAT GOING TO GIVE US NEW INSIGHTS INTO OUR SOULS AND UNLEASH POWERS AS YET UNTOLD?

I BET IT'S ONE OF THOSE PSYCHO-ANALYTICAL RATS.

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EASIEST QUEST EVER

LET'S ROLL, B-DAWG.

SQUEAK!

AS A DRAGON, I HAVE EIGHT MUNDANE SENSES AND SIX SUPERNATURAL ONES. NONE OF THEM CONFIRM THAT THIS IS THE DREADED DIRE RAT.

YOU SAID A RAT'S TAIL.

THERE WAS NO MENTION OF ITS MOOD

HE'S GOT YOU THERE.

AND I'M PREPARED TO PASSIONATELY ARGUE THIS POINT UNTIL NOTHING MAKES SENSE ANY MORE

IF THAT DOESN'T WORK, THEN THE HOURS UPON *HOURS* OF WHINING WILL.

ANOTHER TEST OF COURAGE COMES TO MIND.

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THE ENLIGHTENED WARRIORS WOULDN'T GET EATEN BY AN ANNOYED DRAGON GOD KING.

THERE IS BUT ONE WAY TO FIND OUT.

HE WAS JUST THE BETTER MAN.

BUT HE'S A *DRAGON.*

THE BETTER MAN.

FREE TOUR OF THE TROPICAL CARDIA ISLANDS

ONLY 500 GIL

YOU JUST MADE 1500 GIL, DIDN'T YOU.

YUP

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SO YOU MORONS MET THE GOD OF DRAGONS.

HE'S ALSO THEIR KING.

HE WAS VERY CLEAR ON THAT

HE'S THE KING OF DRAGONS TOO? HOW DOES THAT WORK, EXACTLY? DOES HE WORSHIP H.M-SELF?

I THINK IT MEANS HE RULES BY HIS OWN DIVINE RIGHT IT'S A PRETTY SWEET RACKET, REALLY

OKAY, YOU MET THIS GOD AND/OR KING WHO LIVES IN A DANK HOLE IN THE GROUND, AND HE ASKED YOU TO GET THE TAIL OF A RAT FOR HIM.

THIS DRAGON. WAS HE, BY ANY CHANCE, A HOBO IN A DRAGON SUIT

THAT ABOUT SUMS IT UP

HE LOOKED VERY MUCH LIKE A DRAGON.

THIEF, YOU JUST BLEW MY MIND.

IT WOULD BLOW YOUR MIND TO LEARN THAT WHEELS ARE, IN FACT, ROUND.

BLACK MAGE, PLEASE. I CAN ONLY BE BLOWN SO MANY TIMES IN ONE DAY

THAT'S IT, I'M OUTTA THIS CONVERSATION.

THINK ABOUT IT, GUYS.

HOW DO WE KNOW BAHAMUT ISN'T SOME DRAGON ***BUM*** WHO GETS HIS KICKS FROM HOOCH AND RAT TAIL STEW?

THIS HOMELESS DRAGON MEGA-KING ULTRAGOD WAS PULLING A PRANK. YOU KNOW THAT, RIGHT?

DID HE ASK FOR ANYTHING ELSE? LIKE A BUCKET OF STEAM, PERHAPS?

STEAM IN BUCKETS? THIEF YOU'VE ***BLOWN*** ME AGAIN.

STOP ***SAYING*** THAT!

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I KNOW YOU GUYS AREN'T ELVES, BUT EVEN *YOUR* SPECIES MUST HAVE SOME LIMIT TO STUPIDITY HARD CODED INTO YOUR BASE DNA.

THE DRAGON YOU MET MAY BE A KING, BUT IT IS OF HOBOS AND HIS ONLY CLAIM TO GOD-HOOD IS HOW HE FEELS AFTER A FEW BOTTLES OF HOOCH.

I TURN AROUND FOR *FIVE* MINUTES TO SET UP AN INCREDIBLY PROFITABLE BUSINESS...

...AND YOU GUYS ARE TAKING ORDERS FROM A DRUNK, SUBTERRANEAN MAN IN A SOILED DRAGON OUTFIT HE MADE OUT OF DISCARDED RAT SKINS SEWN TOGETHER WITH CLUMPS OF HIS OWN HAIR

WE PROMISED TO KILL A DIRE RAT FOR HIM.

THAT'S ANOTHER THING.

WHAT'S SO *DIRE* ABOUT A RAT?

IT'S COMMONLY KNOWN THAT SIMPLY ADDING THE TERM "DIRE" TO ANY EXISTING ANIMAL SPECIES WILL PRODUCE A LARGER, SINISTER VARIANT OF THAT ANIMAL

TAKE, FOR EXAMPLE, THE DREAD *DIRE ELK*.

Extremely dire

THAT'S THE STUPIDEST THING I'VE HEARD THAT DIDN'T INVOLVE DRAGON GODS OR THEIR KINGS.

NO, A DIRE ELK BIT MY SISTER ONCE

YOU HAVE A SISTER TOO?

WELL, I WOULDN'T USE THE PRESENT TENSE TO DESCRIBE ANY MEMBER OF MY FAMILY, BUT YEAH.

THE *POINT* IS, YOUR HOBO FRIEND WANTED YOU TO BRING BACK THE TAIL OF A FICTIONAL ANIMAL.

I DON'T THINK HE'S GOING TO BE DISAPPOINTED OR SURPRISED WHEN YOU FAIL

FREE TOUR

TROPICAL

WHAT?

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SEE! JUDGING BY HIS RANK ODOR, CRUDE APPEARANCE, AND THE FACT THAT HE'S A FILTHY DWARF, THIS MAN IS A HOBO.

MUCH LIKE THE "DRAGON" YOU MET EARLIER, YOU RUBES.

THE GUBMENT STOLED MY TEEFS!

GIVE HIM SOME CHANGE SO HE'LL WANDER OFF AND STINK UP SOMEONE ELSE'S PERSONAL SPACE.

GRARGH!

OH, YE GODS!

MY FLESH! MY BEAUTIFUL, ELVEN FLESH! PLEASE HELP!

IF NOT FOR ME, THEN FOR A PAYMENT OF SEVERAL GIL, *EACH!*

I THINK HE WANTS OUR HELP

NO. THIS IS ONE OF THOSE SITUATIONS WHERE YOU DON'T WANT TO GET INVOLVED

THERE'S A NAME FOR THINGS LIKE THAT...

"HELPING"?

THAT'S THE ONE!

HE'S OUR LEADER

HEY, BETTER HIM THAN US.

BUT YOU'VE GOT TO FIGURE A HOBO AS VIOLENT AS *THIS* ONE WON'T STOP AT THIEF

I SAY, WHAT HO, THERE?

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GREAT

GOOD MORROW AND WELL MET, FELLOW ADVENTURERS ALL!

IF YOU'RE THAT JERK RANGER, THEN THE RAT-HOBO IS.

BERSERKER, THE GREATEST CONVERSATIONALIST OF OUR AGE.

ALSO, EVERYTHING HE SAYS IS SCARY

GNASH, RIP, HATE!

OH, I SAY!

SOME-ONE'S GONE AND MANGLED THIS POOR FE...OW AND THEN COVERED ME IN HIS BLOOD AND H.S ORGANS.

THAT'S THE SPIRIT, OLD BEAN. BUCK UP

YOU'VE STI... GOT MOST OF WHAT MAY VERY WE... BE YOUR LIVER

GHHKT

I THOUGHT YOU GUYS RAN OFF TO KILL ONE ANOTHER THANKS TO THIEF'S FINEST MENTA. HOODWINK SINCE RED MAGE'S B.G, FAKE CROSS-DRESSING THING.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THIS ONE IS THOUGH?

WAIT, WHAT?

YEAH.

AMNES.A DUST!

WHY IS IT BLACK?

BECAUSE IT'S GUNPOWDER.

IT'S WHAT?!

SEE, YOU'VE AL.READY FORGOTTEN.

NOW WHAT WERE WE--

BROTHERS, ARE YOU SAFE? IT SOUNDED ..IKE SOME-ONE S AMNES.A DUST TOOK LIGHT

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Fighter's Journal
(Not for reading unless you are Fighter like me)

Oh, what adventures we've had It seems like ever since we got back from the endless void univarse filled with infinited us-es, things have been whiz bang boom-EXCITEMENT. There was taffy and it was free and that makes it the best But then I think it must have been forged from Black Mage's lungs 'cause it did not taste good

(Note to self: is "forged" the right word for taffy? Methinks it is probably mined Must remember to ask the Dwarves about their precious taffies)

We met a dragon who is our friend and a king and a god and a hobo and not real anyway according to Thief Wow, he must be BUSY to keep up with all of that stuff without even being there. He wants to eat a rat or something and if we help then he'll unlock a door for us. Or something. I was thinking about taffy when he was talking.

In the very bestest (non-taffy related) news, we've met up with our friends Berserker and Ranger again!!!!! They brought their friends Cleric and Rogue with them this time. There are so many warriors now it's like someone opened up a jar and inside the jar was a bunch of warriors (it is a large jar) and they were all like "ARGH, RUN, WE ARE FREE MEN AT LAST" and then they all ran out and there were dozens of warrios running all over the place and they are us. Y'know?

I better go before anyone notices me not paying attention. I am so smart, because they never do! Fighter rocks forevar!!!!!!!

I FEEL LIKE WE SHOULD DO *YOU* A FAVOR NOW.

FOUND ANOTHER PIECE!

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SO

YOU'RE Y'KNOW. YOU'RE WEARING, UM, RAT

OH, INDEED

OKAY DON'T PANIC JUST KEEP TALKING AND HE **MIGHT** NOT RIP YOUR FACE OFF WITH HIS TEETH AND PEE ON WHAT'S LEFT

DO THAT OFTEN?

ONLY WHEN HUNTING FOR DIRE RATS.

I PRAYED TO THE TRICKSTER GOD TO FIX YOUR FRIEND UP

THE BLUE BOOK OF DIVINITY DOESN'T LIST A SINGLE PRAYER FOR TRICKSTERS SO I HAD TO WING IT.

YEAH, IT'S BECAUSE THEY SCREW YOU FASTER THAN A TWO DOLLAR WHORE.

AND USUALLY WITH A SHIV THEY CONVINCED YOU TO MAKE

OH, I'M SURE YOU'RE THINKING OF SOME OTHER GOD

THE ONE I MET **GAVE** ME THIS HEALING SHIV

OKAY. CLERIC ISN'T GOOD WITH GODS.

WHICH END DOES THE HEALING.

OH, QUITE THE CONTRARY, REALLY

WE'D HAVE NEVER MADE IT TO THIS ISLAND IF NOT FOR CLERIC'S PRAYERS TO THE SEA GODS.

OF COURSE, THE GODS WORK IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS.

LIKE A HEALING SHIV

FOR INSTANCE, WE GOT HERE VIA SHIPWRECK

THE PART THAT CONFUSES ME, THOUGH, IS THAT WE WEREN'T ACTUALLY **IN** A SHIP

OR **ANYWHERE** NEAR AN OCEAN.

SO **VERY** MYSTERIOUS.

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SO WHO ARE YOU?

RAVEN.

AND WHY ARE YOU HERE?

TO TRICK DEATH.

ACTUALLY, THAT'S HAPPEN.NG. WELL, YOUR FOUR-DIMEN-SIONAL BRAIN COULDN'T COMPREHEND A WORD FOR IT, SO WE'LL JUST SAY THAT IT'S HAPPEN.NG "ELSEWHERE."

AH.

WHY DO I FEEL LIKE THAT DIDN'T ANSWER MY QUESTION?

LET'S START THIS OVER.

I'M RAVEN, THE LOCAL TOTEMISTIC REPRESENTATION OF TRICKERY. I'VE ENTERED INTO A ***MOSTLY*** LEGIT CON-TRACT TO BRING YOU BACK FROM THE BRINK OF DEATH.

I SEE.

THERE'S ONE PROBLEM THOUGH.

I'M AN ELF.

I BELIEVE THE GODS MADE THEM-SELVES IN ***OUR*** IMAGE BECAUSE WE'RE SO DAMN GOOD LOOKIN'

I DON'T BELIEVE IN A TOTEM-BASED DIVINITY

HEY, NEITHER DOES THAT CLERIC KID, BUT HE AIN'T PICKY

AND YOU SHOULDN'T BE EITHER

WHY'S THAT?

WITHOUT MY HELP, YOU'LL BE STUCK HERE FOREVER

YOU DON'T KNOW ME VERY WELL, DO YOU.

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THAT'S FUNNY.

MOST PEOPLE DON'T LIKE THE IDEA OF BEING STUCK IN THEIR OWN PERSONAL HELL

OH, COME ON.

I'M SUPPOSED TO BELIEVE WHAT A GOD OF TRICKERY SAYS?

IN WHAT POSSIBLE WAY COULD INFINITE WEALTH BE ANYTHING BUT MY IDEA OF BLISS?

THAT'S JUST IT THERE'S NOTHING LEFT TO STEAL

OH, YOU DIDN'T SERIOUSLY THINK YOU'D END UP ANYWHERE ELSE, DID YOU?

YOU'VE GOT TO GET ME OUT OF HERE

DON'T WORRY, DON'T WORRY I TOOK THIS CASE FOR A REASON.

I'LL DO ANYTHING.

THAT WAS THE REASON.

GUYS, I JUST HAD THE WEIRDEST CONVERSATION WITH BERSERKER

AND HE HARDLY TALKED ABOUT RAPE OR PILLAGE

ANYWAY, HIS GROUP IS ALSO SEARCHING FOR A LEGENDARY DIRE RAT

HE'S DRESSED UP AS ONE TO LURE THEM OUT

OUR COURSE IS CLEAR.

KILL BERSERKER.

AND TAKE HIS BODY TO BAHAMUT AS OUR OWN "DIRE RAT"?

I JUST WANT TO MURDER SOMEONE. DON'T WEIRD IT UP

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WOULDN'T IT BE MORE PRUDENT TO FIND OUT WHY THE OTHER WARRIORS WANT A DIRE RAT INSTEAD OF KI...ING THEM?

NOW, SEE, I WAS THINKING THAT IN THE BACK OF MY MIND, BUT NOW THAT I HEAR IT OUT LOUD, IT SOUNDS RIDICULOUS.

WAIT, I THINK HE MIGHT BE ON TO SOME-THING.

FIGHTER'S— HOW TO PUT THIS NICELY—

COMPLETE MENTAL INCOMPETENCE MAY HAVE STUMBLED UPON A UNIQUE SOLUTION TO OUR PROBLEM.

I DON'T FOLLOW

IT MAY SOUND OF LUNACY, BUT SOME EXPERIENCE SYSTEMS HAVE ACTUALLY CHARTED OUT REWARDS FOR ACTIONS ***OTHER*** THAN MURDER.

OKAY, I ***DOUBLE*** DON'T FOLLOW

PS. I am now a super genious!

TWO DIFFERENT THINGS CON-FUSED YOU NOW?

OR DOES IT MEAN YOU'VE BEEN CON-FUSED TWO TIMES? I DON'T GET IT.

NO, IT'S LIKE WHEN YOU "DOUBLE DARE" IT'S ***TWICE*** THE DARE

I WAS SAYING IT WAS CONFUSING, BUT IN A COOL WAY I HOPE IT CATCHES ON.

ANYWAY.

FIGHTER MAY HAVE UN-COVERED FERTILE NEW GROUNDS FOR THE ACQUISITION OF EXPERIENCE POINTS.

IF YOU START USING IT NOW YOU'LL BE COOL BEFORE ANY-ONE ELSE. YOU'LL BE ***DOUBLE*** COOL.

DOUBLE super genious!

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SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FEB 26 2005

MEMORANDUM FOR THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
(PERSONNEL AND READINESS)

SUBJECT: Codename Epsilon-Zeta Investigation (on-going)

As you well know, it was your predecessor's goal to establish an elite fighting force comprised of experts in all fields of modern combat. The purpose of this unit, Codename Epsilon-Zeta, was to be deployed where more traditional military action would meet unusual degrees of resistence or likely face unacceptable losses.

After a grueling one-year recruitment period to find the best and the brightest servicemen, and having spent millions of dollars on their special base of operations and advanced training facilities, it is understanble that the Department of Defense would like to know why these soldiers were never assigned to Epsilon-Zeta.

Please see the enclosed thirty-six page report. It represents the culmination of my attempts to trace the breakdown in communication that led to the current day incarnation of Epsilon-Zeta, or «EZ Company» as it has come to be known.

Sgt. Stone

and the men of E2 Company in...Dead Men Tell No Jokes

Okay, men. The enemy is just over that hill

I won't lie to you It will be hell.

That's okay, Cap! I've got the Sniper kit!

I'll pick off those jerks well before they know what hit 'em

That's good, we'll need--

I've also got the Sniper kit, Cap

Me too.

Sniper 4eva!

Sniper reporting, sir!

Okay

Did anyone come with anything that wasn't Sniper gear?

I've got a Sniper Rifle

That's great

Oh, look An enemy tank is approaching

Perhaps we can disable it with some harsh language.

We could snipe it

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Sgt. Stone
and the men of E2 Company in...A Fistful of Bullets

My name is Pvt Roy G. Bivowitz

And this is my first day with E2 Company

I must look like a wide-eyed newbie to these guys

But I'm sure I'll fit right in soon enough.

Uh, hi. Command sent--

Hey, hand me that central torque spanner.

Uh, okay, sure

Like I was saying, Command HQ sent me--

Hold it How'd *you* know what a central torque spanner was?

They didn't exist until yesterday when I *invent-ed* them.

It, it was just a wrench.

Wrenches are all you *have*

That's not true. I've also got this surgical grade shotgun.

Permission to runaway

CHA-CHIK!

I really think you're being rash about this whole thing there's no need to be so rash, dear God, be less rash about this! We can talk it out, talking is good, there are no bullets when you talk if no one is crazy, not that I'm saying you are crazy or anything, it's a matter of [illegible] shotgun [illegible] drop of a hat, I think it's [illegible] it.

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Sgt. Stone

and the men of E2 Company in...Prognosis: Murder

TK! This is your sergeant, come in. Over

Move *one* inch and I'll show you why I only need to use wrenches and shotguns.

I have *no idea* what that means, and that only makes it worse.

Captain, I read you Over.

Enemy tank is inbound, do you copy? Over.

Trembling will only make it shoot

Copy that, Cap ETA?

Are you guys wearing Tex's sniper gear?

He's going to be *so* pissed off

We ain't seen Tex in *three* days, man. He'll never know.

MEANWHILE, A THREE DAY HIKE TO THE NORTH..

I can't *believe* they brought sniper gear to a tank fight.

Wait, *sniper* gear?!

Be-sides, what's he gonna do? *Shoot* at us?

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Sgt. Stone

and the men of EZ Company in...Today We Die, Tomorrow We Kill

It's *my* turn to work the turret.

You got to use it last time.

But I didn't get to *shoot* it last time.

That's not *my* fault.

When we are done slaughtering the Americans, I am *so* declaring holy war on you

Every day you declare a *new* holy war. Just once, I would like to see one day without a holy war.

You ate my falafel!

Merciful Allah, that was *three weeks ago* and it was an accident

You know hiding behind this crate is an entirely empty gesture.

Have you seen what a tank shell can do to a human body?

What are they *waiting* for?

Frankly, sir, I'm not one to complain.

THUNK

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Sgt. Stone

and the men of EZ Company in...Peril at Thirty-Thousand Feet

Who is that?

Him? That's just the new guy I was giving him a hard time.

New guy, huh? Well, getting the newbie killed in his first ten minutes of service will certainly save us the trouble giving him a nickname

Ol' Splatter-guts

How about Methuselah?

See, it's ironic

It won't matter what we call him if that tank crew wakes up

Man, screw you guys

Guys? I'm gonna make a run for it to open up your line of fire.

Wait! I heard if you don't move, then they can't see you

You're thinking about Tyra[illegible] again.

Fact: Tyrannosaur is the tank of the pre-historic world.

Can we focus!?

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Sgt. Stone
and the men of E2 Company in...A Coffin of One's Own

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My name is Pvt Roy G Bivowitz

And I am not going to be killed on my first day

GRUNT

UH!

LEN!

BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP

What is that beeping?

It detects you

Oh, that's just the jerk detector.

That does it!

Did you guys see that?

Gunny, how many times are we going to have this conversation?

Guys?

The ankylosaurus is *clearly* the tank of the pre-historic world.

Then T-Rex is the artillery strike

Guys?

I can agree to those terms

Gentlemen?

The stegosaur

Discuss

Don't let them get you down, kid you did good today.

Welcome to E2 company.

I proved I belonged here that day

And six months later they finally gave me a nickname based on the outcome of a drunken game of darts

Now they call me Rookie.

Thank God Slim passed out. If not, I'd be Suzie

SPECIAL OPS

Code Name: Maniac Eagle

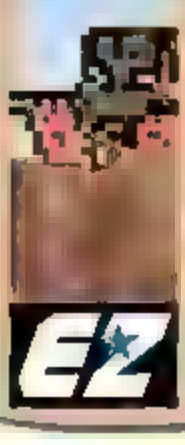
File Name: Samuel Stone
Primary Military Specialty: Infiltration
Secondary Military Specialty: Demolitions, Infantry
Birthplace: CLASSIFIED

Sam Stone is EZ Company's squad leader. As an expert in the subtle arts of demolitions and infiltration, Sgt. Stone is most at home during covert operations. The men under his command often refer to him as "Cap" or "Captain" even though he is clearly a sergeant.

"Oh, look. There's an enemy tank. Perhaps we can disable it with some harsh language."

Sniper

Code Name: Logical Bare



File Name: CLASSIFIED
Primary Military Specialty: Sharpshooting, Scouting
Secondary Military Specialty: Infiltration
Birthplace: CLASSIFIED

The man simply known as "Tex" is EZ Company's sharpshooter. He is rarely seen and spends much of his time on long scout missions that serve little purpose other than to make sure everyone knows he's living up to the lone wolf stereotype.

"I can't believe those morons brought sniper gear to a tank fight. Wait, sniper gear?"

MEDIC

Code Name: Axe Koala

File Name: Wayne Thomas
Primary Military Specialty: Field Medic
Secondary Military Specialty: Small arms, Infantry
Birthplace: CLASSIFIED

Wayne "Doc" Thomas is EZ Company's medic. Let's just say the man is kept very, very busy. Slim alone requires several hours of surgery every few days.

"Gentlemen, the stegosaur. Discuss."

ENGINEER

Code Name: Engine Ocelot

File Name: Nicolas Richards
Primary Military Specialty: Mechanics
Secondary Military Specialty: Infantry, Demolitions
Birthplace: CLASSIFIED

Nicolas "TK" Richards keeps EZ Company's vehicles running no matter the circumstances. He has about a dozen dangerous ideas every minute. Occasionally they are directed at the enemy.

"Move one inch and I'll show you why I only need to use wrenches and shotguns."

ASSAULT

Code Name: Wire Camel

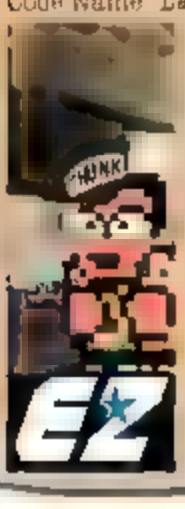
File Name: Charles James
Primary Military Specialty: Infantry
Secondary Military Specialty: Artillery
Birthplace: CLASSIFIED

Charlie "Slim" James is EZ Company's one man front line. Someone put a grenade launcher on his rifle. He's never been happier. He is good friends with Doc, mostly because Charlie's primary battle tactic is to be in the worst possible place at the worst possible time.

"Besides, what's he gonna do? Shoot at us?"

ANTI-TANK

Code Name: Lancer Puma



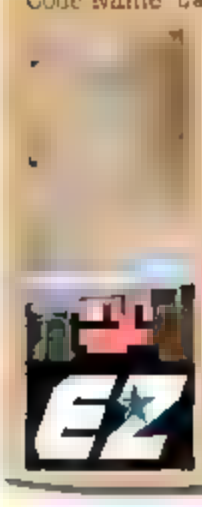
File Name: Roy G. Bivowitz
Primary Military Specialty: Anti-Tank apparently
Secondary Military Specialty: Infantry
Birthplace: CLASSIFIED

Roy G. Bivowitz is EZ Company's newest member. This is why A) they call him Wookie and B) he's the one stuck with the anti tank weapon.

"I really think you're being rash about this whole thing there's no reason to be so rash, dear God, be less rash!"

SUPPORT

Code Name: Cannon Lizard



File Name: Aaron McGuns
Primary Military Specialty: Anti-Infantry
Secondary Military Specialty: LMGs, Supply Management
Birthplace: CLASSIFIED

Aaron "Gunny" McGuns is EZ Company's long ranged, suppressive fire, anti infantry solution. He is personally responsible for increasing the mean lead content of any nation in which he is stationed by point two percent.

"Fact: Tyrannosaur is the tank of the pre-historic world."

THE ENEMY

Code Name: Shine Octopus

File Name: Habib Al Omar
Primary Military Specialty: Counter-Intelligence
Secondary Military Specialty: Laundry
Birthplace: UNKNOWN

Habib Al Omar was shuffled through the ranks until he landed a position as Chief of Counter Intelligence and Interrogation at Hill 403. Due to the non existant strategic value of this camp, Habib's talents have gone to waste. This has only encouraged him to practice them daily on his comrade.

"When we are done slaughtering the Americans, I am so declaring holy war on you."

THE ENEMY

Code Name: Refulgent Cat

File Name: Mikal Al Abir
Primary Military Specialty: All forms of combat
Secondary Military Specialty: Cooking
Birthplace: UNKNOWN

Mikal Al Abir had been the only soldier stationed at Hill 403, the tactically least important fortification under enemy control, for three years. He suspected his commanders had forgotten about him. Then they sent Habib Al Omar. He'd rather have been forgotten.

"Oh, that's the jerk detector. It detects you."

SO, WE HAVE A GOOD RAPPORT

OH, WE'RE BURSTING WITH RAPPORTS. AND ALL OF THEM ARE GOOD

GOOD IS GOOD LET'S TALK ABOUT RAT TAILS..

OH-HO!

NEARBY.

AND THEN OPTIMUS PRIME IS ALL LIKE--

THE ONLY WAY I COULD CARE LESS ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT IS IF YOU KEEP TALKING.

SO I UNDERSTAND YOU GENTLEMEN ARE IN THE MARKET FOR TAILS OF RAT

NO WE'RE NOT, WHO HAVE YOU BEEN TALKING TO, HOW MANY DO YOU HAVE?

I HAPPEN TO KNOW A GUY WHO KNOWS ANOTHER GUY WHO LIVES NEXT TO THE GUY WHO IS THE PRIMARY IMPORTER/EXPORTER OF GENUINE IMMITATION RAT TAILS.

WAIT A SECOND

IMMITATION? THAT SOUNDS SUSPICIOUS.

I KNOW THIS OTHER GUY

HE SAYS THAT FOUR OUT OF FIVE DRAGON GOD KINGS CAN'T TELL THE DIFFERENCE.

HOW STUPID DOES ROGUE THINK WE ARE?

HE'S TOTALLY A SCIENTIST OR VERY MUCH LIKE ONE ANYWAY

HOW MUCH FOR TWO?

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ONLY TWO RAT TAILS?

BUT WHAT ABOUT THIEF AND RED MAGE?

HELL, YOU'RE NOT GETTING ONE EITHER.

I'M GONNA HAVE TWO CLASS CHANGES. FIRST TO BLACK WIZARD, THEN TO SOME SORT OF SUPER WIZARD ULTRA BEING.

I SHOULD IMAGINE THAT SPACE-TIME AS WE NOW KNOW IT WILL HOLD NO MEANING FOR ME AT THAT STAGE OF EVOLUTION. I'LL BE A CHICK MAGNET

GASP!

WELL LOOK AT THAT, ANOTHER BEAUTIFUL MIRACLE IF IT WEREN'T FOR MY ATHEISM, I'D BE IMPRESSED BY IT.

HOW CAN YOU BE AN ATHEIST?

YOU TALK TO THE GODS EVERY SINGLE DAY AND CONVINCE THEM TO DO THINGS LIKE BRING BACK THE DEAD!

RIGHT

AND IF I WANT TO REMAIN COMPETITIVE IN THIS MARKET, I CAN'T AFFORD TO SHOW FAVORITES.

NOT TO COMPLAIN, BUT WHY IS THERE A SHARP PAIN IN THE SMALL OF MY BACK?

WELL HOW DO YOU THINK A HEALING SHIV WORKS? MAGIC?

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OKAY, LET'S COMPARE NOTES.

WHAT IS THIS, SOME KINDA STUDY GROUP OF LAME?

WHO TAKES NOTES? SERIOUSLY

I, ER, I WOULDN'T KNOW

BUT I DO KNOW WHY RANGER AND BERSERKER ARE STILL ALIVE AND WHY THEY'RE LOOKING FOR A RAT TAIL.

I FEEL IT PRUDENT TO MENTION THAT NEITHER OF THESE MATTER IF WE JUST MURDER THEM.

YES, BUT--

THEN IT'S SETTLED, NEXT SUBJECT!

I'D LIKE TO MENTION HOW GODDAMN AMAZING I AM. I CONNED A GOD OF TRICKERY IN THE AFTERLIFE.

AFTERLIFE?

YOU KNOW YOU WEREN'T ACTUALLY DEAD, RIGHT? JUST VERY CLOSE TO IT

THAT'S CRAZY.

WHY WOULD RAVEN LIE ABOUT...OH. THE TRICKERY THING.

MAYBE I SHOULD'VE READ HIS CONTRACT A LITTLE MORE CLOSELY.

CONTRACT TROUBLE? SOUNDS LIKE YOU FINALLY GOT HOISTED ON YOUR OWN PETARD.

WAIT, THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE AT ALL.

DAMMIT, PETARD, NOT *PICARD*

ENGAGE AND ROLL OUT!

STOP THINKING ABOUT YOUR STUPID STAR TREK/TRANSFORMERS CROSS-OVER FAN FICTION.

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AFTER A SERIES OF **PROBING** INTERVIEWS, I WAS ABLE TO DETERMINE WHY THE OTHER WARRIORS ARE NOT DEAD

RANGER, FLEEING FROM BERSERKER'S BLIND, MURDEROUS RAGE, RAN AWAY.

THIS EVENTUALLY LED HIM TO A DESERT WHERE HE REGROUPED WITH CLERIC AND ROGUE, HIS "LOST" COMPANIONS.

IT SEEMS ROGUE AND CLERIC HAD BEEN ROAMING THE AREA, **PROBING** IT IF YOU WILL IN SEARCH OF REAL ESTATE DEALINGS WITH A NOMADIC TRIBE OF SAND PEOPLE WHO, INCIDENTALLY, HAVE NO CONCEPT OF OWNERSHIP

WHEN BERSERKER EVENTUALLY CAUGHT UP WITH RANGER HE WAS EXHAUSTED FROM **PROBING** THROUGH THE DESERT WHILE KEEPING UP THE DEMEANOR OF A RAMPAGING MINDLESS KILLER

I KNOW A GUY

HE'S THE NUMBER ONE IMPORTER/EXPORTER OF BEACHFRONT PROPERTY FOR A LEGIT NATION I CAN'T REMEMBER [redacted].

I THINK HE'D BE INTERESTED IN ACQUIRING YOUR ENDLESS BEACH-LIKE WASTELAND

KILL. POOP RAPE.

ALSO: THIRSTY TIRED DIE.

RANGER TOOK ADVANTAGE OF BERSERKER'S WEAKENED STATE TO SHOW HIM A **PROBING** ART CLIP FROM A NEWSPAPER CLERIC HAD BROUGHT FROM CIVILIZATION

THUS EXONERATED RANGER WAS THEN ABLE TO BEFRIEND BERSERKER ONCE AGAIN AND THE OTHER WARRIORS WERE REUNITED AT LONG LAST.

Band of roughians decimate Dwarven nation
Let's face it, the Elves are probably to Blame

ANY QUESTIONS? YES, BLACK MAGE?

A TWO-PARTER

ONE, HOW DID THE OLD NEWSPAPER HAVE AN ARTICLE ABOUT EVENTS IN A REMOTE DESERT THAT HADN'T HAPPENED YET?

TWO, DOES RM'S **CONSTANT** USE OF THE WORD "PROBING" MAKE ANYONE ELSE FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE?

WHAT'S WRONG WITH BEING THOROUGH? I **ALWAYS** GO FOR THE DEEPEST PROBING ACTION HUMANLY POSSIBLE.

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SIRS AND GENTLEMEN

I HAVE GATHERED YOU HERE TO DISCUSS OUR SISTER GROUP, THE WARRIORS OF LIGHT

I SAY, POINT OF ORDER

THE CHAIR RECOGNIZES BERSERKER

ISN'T THE TERM "SISTER GROUP" A BIT... ODD?

WELL, THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT, BUT...

..COULD SAY WE'RE YOUR SISTER GROUP..

..A KIND OF SISTER GROUP..

2!

..WARRIOR SOLIDARITY FOR MY SISTERS. WE'RE LIKE AMAZONS THAT WAY

SISTERS ARE DOIN' IT FOR THEM-SELVES!

IN ANY CASE, I ASKED THE ..IGHT WARRIORS WHY THEY SET US 'GAINST EACH OTHER

ALIENS.

GHOSTS.

GHOST ALIENS.

WHO POSSESSED US.

FROM SPACE!

I DIDN'T KNOW THERE *WERE* ALIEN GHOSTS.

BUT *IF* THEY POSSESSED PEOPLE, I BET THEY'D DO SO FROM SPACE.

AGREED.

THEIR STORY CHECKS OUT

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Sgt. Stone

and the men of EZ Company in...A Tomb Built for Seven

So, I've been with EZ Company for a while now.

And I think I'm getting the hang of life here

SKREE!

More or less

But one thing that keeps gnawing at me is where TK got that nickname.

y'know, that's just what he's always been called

I guess you'd have to ask *him*.

AND SO...

But there was an *accident*, I think the psycho-generator was misaligned, and hey, long story short, it seems "teamkill" works too.

I think it's unfair. I mean, can you *really* say someone, or an entire squad for that matter, is dead if their spirits have reincarnated as giant, screaming spiders fueled by hatred and blood?

So, TK, if you don't mind my asking.

Um, why do they call you that?

It was *supposed* to stand for "telekinesis"

Cap, the next time I want to know anything, please remind me that I *don't* want to know anything

Ever

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WELL, I'VE DONE IT AGAIN.

RUINED OUR EVERY CHANCE TO SUCCEED IN OUR GOALS?

PUT ON A DRESS?

OOH, I KNOW! YOU TOOK A COURSE OF ACTION SO CIRCUMLOCUTIOUS THAT IT WOULD'VE BEEN FASTER *AND* EASIER FOR ALL PARTIES IF YOU JUST KILLED YOURSELF?

WELL, I WAS *GOING* TO SAY I TOOK CARE OF THE OTHER WARRIORS, THUS SAVING US ALL *AGAIN* USING MY UNFATHOMABLE INTELLIGENCE BUT, IF YOU'RE NOT INTERESTED, THAT'S FINE TOO.

OKAY, COOL.

SEE YA!

AWW, DON'T WORRY, RM!

I WANNA KNOW HOW YOU DID IT!

WELL BASICALLY WHAT I DID WAS..

SO, I HEAR YOU KNOW A GUY

THAT'S NOT IMPOSSIBLE.

WELL, IF HE'D HAVE ANY INTEREST IN A MAP TO RAT TAIL ISLAND, LET ME KNOW, OKAY?

I THINK WE HAVE SOME BUSINESS TO CONDUCT

BUT FIRST, WHAT *IS* THAT *BITCHIN'* MUSIC?

MUST BE AN *AWESOME* SWORD-GUITAR SOLO!

DO YOU MIND IF I TELL THE STORY

IT WASN'T TESTING WELL WITH THE FIGHTER DEMOGRAPHIC.

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GOOD NEWS, FELLOWS. THE LIGHT WARRIORS PROVIDED ME WITH A MAP TO RAT TAIL ISLAND

WITH THIS MAP, WE'LL BE ENLIGHTENED WARRIORS IN NO TIME!

I THINK YOU GENTLEMEN ARE FORGETTING THE MATTER OF TRACKING DOWN THE GENOCIDAL MADMEN RESPONSIBLE FOR BURNING DOWN DWARF LAND

THE LIGHT WARRIORS SAID THEY'D DEDICATE THEIR LIVES TO HUNTING THE WORLD OVER FOR THE CRIMINAL SCUM RESPONSIBLE.

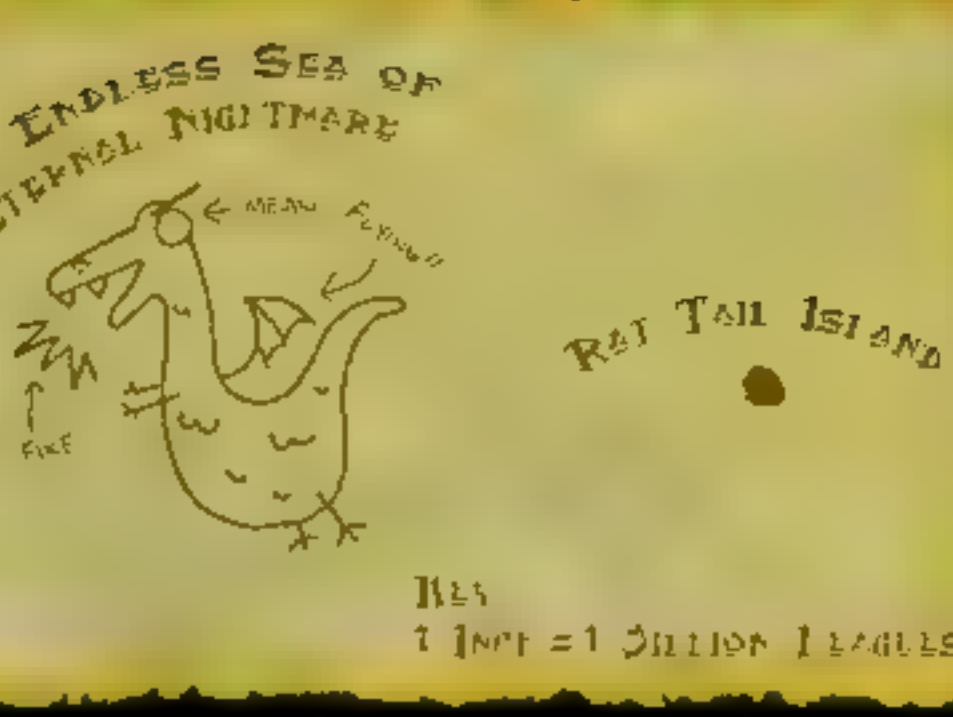
THEREBY FREEING US TO QUEST FOR THE RAT TAIL FULL-TIME!

PRECISELY

GOOD WORK, ROGUE.

IT'S TO BE EXPECTED.

NOW LET'S HAVE A LOOK AT THIS MAP, SHALL WE?



FIRST THING'S FIRST WE'LL NEED ONE OF THOSE ROCKET BOATS.

I KNOW A GUY

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HOW ABOUT THIS THEN?

GREEN ARROW VS. BULLSEYE

A MOST CHALLENGING MATCH.

ON THE ONE HAND, GREEN ARROW IS AN ARCHER OF PRETERNATURAL SKILL ARMED WITH AN ARRAY OF HIGH-TECH ARROWS AND A CUNNING BORN OF THE JUNGLE.

ON THE OTHER, ANY HAND HELD ITEM IN BULLSEYE'S POSSESSION IS A DEADLY THROWN WEAPON THAT CANNOT MISS.

CONSIDERING ALL POSSIBLE ANGLES, AND APPROXIMATELY 89% OF THE IMPOSSIBLE ONES, THE GREATEST INTELLECT OF THIS WORLD--***MINE***--CHOOSES GREEN ARROW AS THE VICTOR.

YOU HAVE CHOSEN THE PATH OF DEFEAT

EXPLAIN!

THERE ARE ONLY TWO POSSIBLE OPENINGS. ONE WHERE GREEN ARROW ATTACKS FIRST, AND THE OTHER WHERE BULLSEYE DOES SO.

IF BULLSEYE TAKES THE FIRST SHOT, IT WOULD KILL GREEN ARROW FLAT OUT

PAPER CLIP, TWIG, WHATEVER. THE ARROW'S LIFE IS OFFICIALLY FORFEIT

GREEN ARROW, ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS ASIDE, IS A MORAL MAN. IF HE TAKES THE FIRST SHOT, IT WILL NOT BE A FATAL ONE. ***HOWEVER***, BULLSEYE'S RETALIATION WOULD BE.

QUID QUO PRO.

BUT, YOU SEE, BULLSEYE'S ONLY ASSET IS HIS IMPECCABLE AIM.

GREEN ARROW POSSESSES THAT AND AN ARSENAL OF SPECIALTY ARROWS.

TELL ME WHAT WOULD BULLSEYE DO AFTER BEING COATED HEAD TO TOE BY THE CONTENTS OF A FAST-ACTING GLUE ARROW?

HOCK A LOOGIE DOWN GREEN ARROW'S WINDPIPE, CHOKING HIM TO DEATH.

OH. GOOD ANSWER.

BUT!

LET US NOT FORGET THAT GREEN ARROW COULD SHOOT ANY PROJECTILE RIGHT OUT OF THE AIR

AH, BUT WHAT ABOUT MULTIPLE PROJECTILES? HM?

HE CAN SHOOT SEVERAL ARROWS AT ONCE WITH THE UTMOST PRECISION.

EVEN IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS CONVERSATION, THAT'S PATENTLY ABSUR--

FWIT FWIT! FWIT!

OH.

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I WOULD HAVE A WORD WITH YOU.

I WOOD RUN AWAY, BUT I'M SIMPLY PINNED DOWN AT THE MOMENT

YES, WELL. I HAVE CERTAIN CONCERNS REGARDING THIS MAP YOU GAVE US.

PINNED DOWN. GET IT?

THAT MAP?

THAT MAP RIGHT THERE?

YOU KNOW, IT'S FUNNY

I HAVE SPECIFIC MEMORIES OF NOT GIVING THAT EXACT MAP TO ANYONE FOR-EVER AND ALWAYS. DON'T YOU THINK THAT'S FUNNY? HEY! WHERE'S FIGHTER AND THIEF?

AND THEN JACKIE CHAN WAS ALL "FIGHTER, ONLY YOUR BLADE CAN DEFEAT AKU" 'CAUSE COBRA COMMANDER HAD KIDNAPPED--

OKAY, FIGHTER? I ASKED IF YOU WANTED SOME LUNCH.

I'M GETTING TO THAT

YOUR DECEPTIONS WILL NOT WORK ON ME, OH CRIMSONED WIZARD

LIES ARE ALL I HAVE, REALLY

BY THE WAY, IGNORING ME IS REALLY STUCK UP OF YOU. AND I'D KNOW!

SERIOUSLY THOUGH, I'M NOT SO NARROW MINDED TO HOLD THAT AGAINST YOU GUYS.

LIES AND VAUDEVILLE.

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SEE, THE MAP'S KEY SAYS THAT ONE INCH IS A "JI...ION" MILES. THAT'S A WHOLLY FICTIONAL NUMBER.

THAT'S EASILY EXPLAINABLE

ARE YOU GUYS GONNA LEAF ME UP HERE?

YES?

OH!

OKAY, YEAH. WELL, Y'KNOW

I HAVE A BIT OF A COLD COMING ON, SO I WRITE ALL MY "M"S AS "J"S.

BECAUSE OF YOUR COLD

YEAH. BLASTED THINGS.

WHAT ABOUT THE "M" HERE IN THE WORD "NIGHTMARES"? THAT'S NOT A "J" AT ALL.

YES, WELL, NOT *THAT* "M." CLEARLY

YOUR ANSWERS ARE UNUSUAL AS ALWAYS, BUT YOU ARE FELLOW HEROIC ADVENTURERS AND SO THERE'S NO REASON TO SUSPECT YOU'RE LYING.

THAT'S US! WE'RE HEROES AND TOTALLY NOT CHARLATANS.

WHAT AN ODD THING TO SAY

IN FACT, I'M PRETTY SURE BLACK MAGE ***ISN'T*** AN AGENT OF DES-TRUCTION.

AND IF YOU THINK I'M USING THESE PUNS AS A STALLING TACTIC UNTIL YOU GET INTO POSITION, THEN YOU'RE ***BARKING*** UP THE WRONG TRE—

METEOR!

I'M NOT FAMILIAR WITH THAT PHRASE

WELL?

I NEED TO WORK ON MY AIM?

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MEANWHILE IN DWARF LAND...

MY LOYAL, BEARDED SUBJECTS.

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF DWARF LAND HAS BEEN A TRYING TIME FOR ALL OF US.

YOUR KING

WE HAVE EACH KNOWN, DOWN TO THE VERY ROOTS OF OUR BEARDS, THE STING OF SACRIFICE AND HARDSHIP

FROM THE LOWLIEST AMONG YOU TO EVEN I, YOUR KING, WHO HAD TO MISS A BATH ONE DAY

YOUR KING

BUT AT LONG LAST OUR KINGDOM IS REBUILT REBUILT ***FOR-EVER.***

YOUR KING

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BEHIND ME LIES THE FULL GLORY OF THE NEW KINGDOM ***YOU*** BUILT FROM ASHES.

FROM THOSE VERY ASHES, DWARFLAND IS REBORN STURDIER, STOCKIER, AND BEARDIER THAN EVER BEFORE.

hooray!

boo-rah!

huzzah!

LET YOUR CHEERS REACH THE HEAVENS. LET THE GODS ***THEMSELVES*** KNOW THAT DWARFLAND, ***OUR*** DWARF-LAND WILL NEVER BURN, WILL NEVER

I'M SORRY, DOES IT SMELL LIKE FLAMING ROCKS RAINING FROM THE SKY TO ANYONE ELSE?

Y'KNOW WE PROBABLY SHOULDN'T HAVE LEFT ALL THE ARCHITECTS, ENGINEERS, AND SCHOLARS IN THEIR HOMES WHEN WE CALLED THIS MEETING.

BOY HINDSIGHT, HUH?

YOUR KING

WELL, I'VE INSPECTED THE AIRSHIP

REPORT!

WHAT YOU'VE GOT HERE IS YOUR BASIC TOTAL SYSTEMS FAILURE.

THE UPPER SUPPORT RIG IS THREE DEGREES OUT OF NOMINAL OPERATING RANGE. JUST *RIGHT* OUT

YOUR L-BEAM IS CRACKED IN AT LEAST THREE PLACES.

I WOULDN'T EVEN ATTEMPT IMPULSE SPEEDS WITH THAT KIND OF DAMAGE

ON THE SUBJECT OF PROPULSION, THE ANTI-MATTER REGULATOR IS COUGHING UP A LUNG.

IF YOU HAVE ANY INTEREST IN NOT BEING VAPORIZED, I'D KEEP THAT TURNED OFF UNTIL WE CAN REPLACE THE UNIT

THE ENTIRE GN/DN TUBE NETWORK IS SHOT

NOT THE TUBES!

THEY MAY AS WELL JUST BE THERE FOR DECORATION AT THIS POINT

DAMMIT ALL.

IS THAT EVERYTHING?

IT'S THE BEST LIST I CAN MAKE WITHOUT A WORKING LEVEL 3 DIAGNOSTIC.

WHERE DO YOU SUGGEST WE START?

FIRST, IT'D BE NICE IF I KNEW WHAT ANY OF THIS STUFF MEANT OR DID.

MEANWHILE IN ELF LAND...

SIRE! DO YOU SEE? THE SKIES BELCH ASH AND BLOT OUT THE SUN.

AND THE WINDS BRING WITH THEM THE FOULEST OF ALL STENCHES. *DWARF*

THIS IS CLEARLY THEIR WORK WAR IS IN THE AIR!

ALSO BURNING HAIR

OH, I HOPE WE CAN GET THE SMELL OUT OF MY ROBES.

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WHAT THE--?!

WHY ISN'T THE AIRSHIP READY?

YOU GUYS WERE SUPPOSED TO PREP IT WHILE I DUPED THE OTHER WARRIORS.

AND A BRILLIANT PLAN THAT WAS, MIGHT I ADD, SENDING THE CON ARTIST TO FIX OUR MAGIC AIRPLANE.

WHY YES, I KNOW. WAAAIT A SECOND. SARCASM?!

NEVER MIND THAT NOW.

I'LL FIX THE AIRSHIP.

IT'S BACK *HERE*! YOU PASSED IT ON THE WAY BEFORE YOU GOT TO ME, HOW DID YOU NOT *SEE* THAT?

SHUT UP, I'M A GENIUS.

MY WAYS ARE INSCRUTABLE!

IS IT ME OR IS RED MAGE ACTING FUNNY?

AND NOT HA-HA FUNNY, BUT MORE LIKE STAB-STAB FUNNY.

NO, I FIND HIS ANTICS TO BE DELIGHTFUL AND HIS INSIGHTS MANIFOLD

ALSO, HE HAS A PLEASING ODOR.

SEE, THAT WAS FUNNY HA-HA *AND* FUNNY STAB-STAB

GOOD COMEDY WORKS ON MULTIPLE LEVELS.

[redacted] HAS A COLOR NOW.

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AND SO, THANKS TO RED MAGE'S MECHANICAL APTITUDE, THE LIGHT WARRIORS TAKE OFF FOR ADVENTURE ONCE MORE!

WOW, I CAN'T BELIEVE RED MAGE WAS ABLE TO REPAIR THE AIRSHIP SO FAST

THERE WASN'T ANYTHING WRONG WITH IT THAT COULDN'T BE FIXED BY MAGIC.

WELL THAT'S... WAIT, WHAT?

HIGHNESS, I BRING YOU NEWS FROM ABROAD!

THAT'S NO WAY TO SPEAK OF MY WIFE.

CAN WE TRY THIS AGAIN?

HIGHNESS, I BRING NEWS FROM...UH, ELSEWHERE!

IS THIS NEWS *CUPCAKE* RELATED?

SADLY, THAT IS NOT THE CASE, MY KING.

THEN BY WHAT POSSIBLE DEFINITION OF THE WORD "NEWS" COULD THIS CONCEIVABLY MATTER?

WAR, MY LIEGE!

WAR, YOU SAY?

ARE WE INVITED?

I AM HAPPY TO REPORT THAT WE ARE NOT, SIRE.

OH, I *NEVER* GET TO HAVE ANY [redacted].

DAD, CORNERIA HAS BEEN ENGAGED IN SEVEN CONCURRENT WARS FOR ABOUT FIVE YEARS.

BUT THOSE HARDLY COUNT

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WE SHOULD PROBABLY REPORT TO SARDA THAT HE IS AN IDIOT.

THERE WERE NO DRAGONS ON THAT ISLAND

WHAT ABOUT BAHAMUT?

YEAH, HE GAVE US A QUEST.

LORD, NOT THIS AGAIN.

HOW CAN I SAY THIS SO THAT YOU WILL UNDERSTAND IT?

LIFE CHANGING QUESTS DO NOT INVOLVE THE TAIL OF A RAT

HOBO QUESTS FOR RAT SOUP *DO*

A WHAT TAIL? BITCH, PLEASE!

RAT. TAIL. SOUP.

BUT THE OTHER WARRIORS WERE ON THE SAME QUEST.

IT'S BECAUSE THEY AREN'T SMART!

YOU WERE ABLE TO FOOL THEM.

YOU.

IMAGINE WHAT A VAGRANT WITH CUNNING BORN OF THE STREETS COULD DO.

MEANWHILE

A RAT TAIL. A *DIRE* RAT'S TAIL.

YOU TOLD THEM TO GET A WHAT?

OH, THAT'S GOOD

THANK YOU.

DO YOU THINK HE'LL SEE IT COMING?

NOT A CHANCE.

I'M *STREET* ...

I'VE BEEN *ON* A STREET, ANYWAY

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FIGHTER!

I BRING A MESSAGE FROM THE HIGHER REALMS!

I DON'T REMEMBER SEEING AN UPSTAIRS IN THE AIRSHIP.

NO, FIGHTER.

THEN WHY'D YOU SAY THERE WAS?

TOUCHE I THINK.

FIGHTER, I'M JUST GOING TO BARREL THROUGH THIS BECAUSE MY TIME ON THIS PLANE IS LIMITED

DID THIEF TRICK YOU INTO BUYING ONE OF HIS HALF-WAY TICKETS?

GET YOUR SPECIAL DISCOUNT TICKETS HERE HALF-WAY TRAVEL PACKAGES. WE GET YOU STARTED, THE REST IS UP TO YOU!

WE'RE ALREADY ON BOARD, WHY WOULD ANYONE BUY A TICKET TO BE EJECTED HALF WAY TO OUR DES-TINATION?

SPECIAL BLACK MAGE ONLY DISCOUNT ONE FREE SHOVE OUT THE AIRLOCK IF HE KEEPS UP THE BACK-TALK

JOKE'S ON THIEF, THOUGH.

I BOUGHT TWO!

FIGHTER YOU MUST TRAVEL TO THE FORBIDDEN CASTLE OF [illegible]

YOU CAN COUNT ON ME, OH CRAZY HALLUCINATION SWORD!

OF COURSE, I'LL NEED TO WRITE DOWN THE NAME OF THAT CAS.. HELLO?

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HEY, BLACK MAGE. DID YOU HAPPEN TO SEE DR. SWORD-OPOLIS?

DR. WHO?

NO, NO. SWORDOPOLIS.

BUT THE RESEMBLANCE IS UNCANNY

FIGHTER, YOU HAVE ALL THE MENTAL CAPACITY OF AN ***ORD EEL***, THE ONLY SEA CREATURE SO STUPID THAT IT USUALLY DROWNS WITHIN MINUTES OF ITS BIRTH.

AND, COINCIDENTALLY, AVOIDS ALL INQUIRIES REGARDING HOW THE SPECIES MANAGES TO BREED IN THE FIRST PLACE

ORD EEL, ***ORD*** EEL, ORD ***EEL***!

ELSEWHERE.

I'M NOT SURE I FULLY UNDERSTAND THE RULES OF THIS GAME.

ELVEN R'IP'EMOFA NO'HAU POKER IS A NUANCED EXPERIENCE FOR THE DISCERNING AND WORLDWISE PLAYER.

CLEARLY

AND, I'M NOT SURE HOW MANY TIMES I HAVE TO TELL YOU THIS YOU DON'T STRIP!

LOOK, IS IT MY TURN TO DRAW OR DEAL?

OR DEAL, OR ***DEAL***, OR DEAL?

HELLO? LIGHT WARRIORS? DO YOU READ ME, OVER?

TSK I DON'T KNOW WHY I BOTHER WITH THIS THING REARRANGING THE LAWS OF THE UNIVERSE IS MUCH LESS OF AN ***ORDEAL*** THAN THE RADIO

OF COURSE!

RADIO CASTLE!

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MY CASTLE! MY PRECIOUS ANTIQUE RADIO BROADCASTING CASTLE! YOU KIDS RUINED IT!

OLD MAN, WE'VE ALREADY AGREED TO HELP REPLACE YOUR TOWER!

SO STOP WHINING OR START BLEEDING THE CHOICE IS YOURS.

YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY, WITH THEIR LONG HAIR AND THEIR VIOLENCE

SHUSH!

IN MY DAY WE WERE HUMBLE.

HAIR WAS A PRIVILEGE, NOT A RIGHT AND THREATS OF VIOLENCE IS WHAT YOU USED TO KEEP SLANTY-EARED MINORITIES IN THEIR PLACE.

SUDDENLY, I CAN'T THINK OF WHY WE SHOULDN'T DEAL WITH THIS IN OUR USUAL EFFICIENT MANNER

BECAUSE I CALLED DIBS

THIS HAS "*SIDEQUEST*" WRITTEN ALL OVER IT

ACCURSED DIBS!

NOW SIR, IF YOU'LL JUST TELLS US WHAT IT IS WE NEED

I'LL TELL YOU WHAT YOU NEED

WHAT YOU YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY NEED IS

GO TO THE CASTLE OF ORDEALS

AND WHERE IS THAT?

WEST GO TO THE WEST.

AND THEY'LL HAVE, WHAT?

REPLACEMENT PARTS?

WEST. THE CASTLE OF ORDEALS. WRITE IT DOWN.

THERE'S CERTAINLY NO NEED TO YELL, SIR

THERE HAS *GOT* TO BE A BETTER WAY TO POSSESS THESE PEOPLE

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ARE WE THERE YET?

NO.

FIRST WE HAVE TO GO THROUGH A FOREST OF DOOM, AND THEN A DESERT OF DESPAIR, AND THEN A SWAMP OF DEATH.

ONLY THEN WILL THE CASTLE OF ORDEALS SHOW ITSELF TO US.

OH, THAT DOESN'T SOUND SO BAD

IT'S A JOURNEY OF A HUNDRED MILES, ON FOOT, THROUGH LANDS INFESTED WITH MAN-EATING MONSTERS THE LIKES OF WHICH THE MIND CAN'T COMPREHEND

SO PLEASE TELL ME HOW COULD IT BE *WORSE*?

WE COULD BE ON FIRE

ON FIRE...

OR DROWNING.

OR DROWNING IN FIRE

OR EATEN BY A GIANT WORM-GOLEM MADE FROM THE UNLIVING FLESH OF A THOUSAND ABORTED FETUSES!

WHERE WOULD YOU GET AN IDEA LIKE THAT?

OVER THERE.

SKREEE!

WELL THIS IS JUST STUPID

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IT ONLY TOOK TWO WEEKS AND A THOUSAND BATTLES FOR OUR LIVES, BUT WE MADE IT

YOU DON'T TEND TO SEE MANY ANCIENT CASTLES WITH SUCH WELL MANICURED LAWNS.

IT'S THE LITTLE TOUCHES THAT MAKE A HOME

ARE WE SURE THIS IS THE RIGHT PLACE?

Welcome to
Castle of Ordeals

EITHER THAT OR IT'S THE WEIRDEST BED AND BREAKFAST IN THE WORLD.

THINK THEY DO GROUP RATES?

I WAS JOKING.

OH SEE, I WAS CONFUSED BY THE TOTAL LACK OF COMEDY

LET'S JUST GO INSIDE.

DICK.

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WHAT CAN WE EXPECT TO FIND HERE?

ASSORTMENT OF HORRORS THAT'LL PEEL BACK THE THIN SHEET OF SANITY COATING YOUR BRAIN THAT SEPARATES THIS WORLD FROM THE OTHER AND LEAVE YOU BABBLING AND EMPTY.

SO SAME CRAP, DIFFERENT DAY?

I LIKE MY WAY BETTER.

THIS IS A TERRIBLE LOCATION FOR A RADIO TOWER REPAIR STORE.

I MEAN, THE CUSTOMER BASE IS ALREADY PROHIBITIVELY SMALL. SETTING UP SHOP WAY OUT HERE IN THE WILDERNESS FROM HELL ISN'T GOING TO GET YOU MUCH FOOT TRAFFIC.

I AM BEGINNING TO SUSPECT THAT THE CRAZY OLD MAN MAY HAVE BEEN LYING. OR CRAZY

WE SHOULD STICK TOGETHER. THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT ABERRATIONS LURK THESE TWISTED HALLWAYS.

PROBABLY MORE HAM RADIO ENTHUSIASTS LIKE THE ONE WHO SENT US HERE.

ALL THE MORE REASON TO BE ON OUR GUARD

DON'T TOUCH ANYTHING OR DO ANYTHING. ONE OF THOSE WEASLY SONS OF BITCHES COULD BE ANYWHERE.

GUYS. CHECK IT OUT!

A DUSTY OLD COLUMN! I'M GONNA TOUCH IT!

[illegible]

NO ONE EVER LISTENS TO THE GENIUS.

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IF I'VE LEARNED *ANYTHING*, AND I HAVEN'T, IT'S THAT A GOOD IDEA *IS* BETTER THE SECOND TIME AROUND

HM.

TAP!

FACT: RAPID CHAIN TELEPORTATION IS LIKE HAVING ALL OF YOUR MATTER INSTANTANEOUSLY SQUEEZED THROUGH A HOLE THE SIZE OF A PHOTON UPHILL BOTH WAYS SIMULTANEOUSLY.

STUPID THING MUST BE BROKEN, I GUESS.

ALL IT DOES IS MAKE FRACTURED SCREAMS COME OUT OF THE WALLS.

PROBABLY BECAUSE IT NEEDS MORE TAPPIN' TO WORK!

DEAR GOD WHY!

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WELL, ACCORDING TO MY MINI-MAP, I'VE EXPLORED THIS DUNGEON FULLY

HMMM.

START, MENU, OPTIONS, VIDEO, MINI-MAP, OFF

A SWITCH, EH?

DARE I?

BUT WHO KNOWS WHAT HORRORS THIS SWITCH MAY UNLOCK?

WHY WOULD THERE *BE* A SWITCH IN THE MIDDLE OF A ROOM?

SURELY ONE WOULD NOT GO THROUGH THE EFFORT OF INSTALLING A SWITCH FOR THE EXPRESS PURPOSE OF NOT USING IT.

AND IF IT *IS* MEANT TO BE ACTIVATED, THEN WHY NOT DEFAULT THE SWITCH TO THE DESIRED POSITION FROM THE VERY START?

BUT, BY THAT LOGIC, WOULD ONE NOT FOREGO THE SWITCH ***ENTIRELY?*** THUS MAKING THE ACTIVATED STATE THE ONLY OPTION.

I WASH MY HANDS OF YOU, OH LITTLE SWITCH.

THE RESPONSIBILITY IS TOO GREAT FOR ONE MAN TO BEAR

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HUH. A LOCKED DOOR.

LOOKS LIKE I'M STUCK.

FOR THE NEXT THREE SECONDS!

THAT'S RIGHT, ***DOOR***. THAT'S HOW IT GOES DOWN IN BLACK MAGE TOWN.

MAN, I LOVE THE USE OF MY LEGS. SO AWESOME!

SAUNK!

WHY...

MAYBE IF I

KATHUNK

WELL, I'M STUMPED

KATHUNK

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THIS IS OBVIOUSLY THE BEST CASTLE EVER.

CENSORED ACTS OF VANDALISM!

SO. DID I WIN?

THIS COLUMN IS OFFICIALLY TAPPED OUT. GET IT? OF COURSE I DO, I'M ME!

MAN, I HAVE **GOT** TO SHARE THIS GREAT JOKE WITH THE GUYS.

AT LAST! THAT HELL-DOOR IS VANQUISHED AND I'M SAFE. SAFE FOREVER.

AM I PULLING THE LEVER, OR IS THE LEVER PULLING ME?

IS THERE, DARE I TO THINK IT, ANY DIFFERENCE AT ALL?

AM I NOT PULLING THE VERY LEVER OF MY ETERNAL SOUL?

WHY DID I NOT SEE THE DOUBLE ENTENDRE IN THAT UNTIL NOW?

AND WHY AM I TALKING LIKE THIS WITH MY ARMS UP IN THE AIR?

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SEE, THE GUY YOU WANT IS SOMEONE ELSE. HE'S A JERK, YOU'LL *LOVE* KILLING HIM.

OH, GOOD, YOU'RE SITTING NOW. NOW PLEASANT FOR MY EYES.

NO, SEE, *THIEF* IS THE ONE YOU NEED TO TALK TO.

THAT'S... AN *UNUSUAL* CHOICE.

OKAY.

UM. OH, I'M GREEDY AND, UH, NAUSEOUS...? YEAH. WHAT A WASTED LIFE. WOE IS UNTO HE WHO IS I

ER, MY WIFE, WHO IS COMPLETELY REAL, OH, HOW I GUESS I'VE NEGLECTED HER.

I'LL JUST CHANGE MY WAYS NOW DONE!

IT IS. IT TOTALLY IS.

WAIT! WAIT, I THINK I.. YES, THAT'S A BREAKTHROUGH WHEW!

NO. NO, I'M GOOD. THANKS.

IT WOULD BE, UH, *GREEDY* OF ME TO ASK THAT OF YOU. GO ON AHEAD.

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LET'S REVIEW.

YOU BUILT ***SOMETHING***. BUT YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS BECAUSE YOU NEVER WROTE DOWN WHAT IT WAS FOR WHEN YOU STILL HAD ENOUGH POINTS LEFT IN ENGINEERING TO KNOW

I HAVE BEEN DEFEATED BY MY OWN INTELLECT I DON'T KNOW IF THAT'S ENCOURAGING OR ***DEPRESSING*** THOUGH.

WELL, AS I SEE IT, THERE IS ONLY ***ONE*** WAY TO BE SURE

I CHOOSE TO BELIEVE THAT WAS A SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION OF WHATEVER IT IS I BUILT

CRASH!

A TYRANNOSAUR, EH? AS IT JUST SO HAPPENS, I WAS BORN TO HUNT DINOSAURS. SEE?

I'VE GOT THE TATTOO AND ***EVERY-THING***.

BORN TO HUNT DINOSAURS

OH COME ON. THAT DOESN'T MAKE ***ANY*** SENSE. HOW CAN DINOSAUR HUNTING BE YOUR ***PRIMARY*** PURPOSE?

WE'RE EXTINCT

THEN EXPLAIN YOURSELF

EXACTLY

ANOTHER COLUMN.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

AS IF I DIDN'T KNOW!

TAP!

POOF!

WHAT THE--!

IS NOT A MAN JUDGED BY HIS ACTIONS? THUS YOU HAVE SHOWN THAT APATHY IS YOUR UNDOING. AND SO THE ORDEAL OF SLOTH IS UPON YOU!

YET YOU ANGUISH. YOU RELY ON THAT GIFT RATHER THAN IMPROVE UPON IT

HOW'S THAT?

YOU ARE GIFTED BEYOND ALL OTHERS WITH A BLADE

ARE YOU NOT?

I AM AWESOME

DUDE THAT'D BE A LOT OF WORK

AND THAT, FIGHTER, IS WHY YOU MUST OVERCOME THE ORDEAL OF SLOTH!

I HAVE TO WRESTLE A SLOTH?

NO. NO, FIGHTER. JUST NO.

IT WON'T BE ONE OF THOSE THREE-TOED ***FREAK*** SLOTHS, WILL IT? THEY ARE THE THINGS OF NIGHTMARES.

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"SLOTH" IS MORE THAN A NOUN REFERING TO A LARGE MAMMAL, FIGHTER.

IT ALSO REFERS TO AN AVERSION TO WORK

AND IT'S WHAT YOU CALL A GROUP OF BEARS.

SO NOW THE SLOTHS HAVE BEAR BACK UP?

YOU'RE NOT EVEN TRYING TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS GOING ON, ARE YOU?

THAT'S, AT THE VERY LEAST DOUBLE SLOTH!

DID YOU PICK UP THAT SLANG FROM MY FRIEND BLACK MAGE?

WHO?

WHAT?

FIGHTER, LISTEN!

YOU MUST LEARN TO USE YOUR MIND AS WELL AS YOUR BLADES.

RIGHT!

MY BRAIN SAID THIS WAS FASTER.

DOUMPSE

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I'VE BEEN WANDERING THESE ACCURSED HALLS FOR DAYS! OR MAYBE ABOUT AN HOUR I DUNNO, I'M CRANKY

IN THE NAME OF ALL THE FORCES OF CHAOS, WHEN ARE WE GOING TO BE DONE?

POOF! AGAIN

UM.

OH, IT'S SIMPLE.

THIS IS THE CASTLE OF ORDEALS.

PEOPLE COME HERE TO FACE THEIR INNER DEMONS, GAIN INSIGHTS INTO THEIR BEINGS, CRAP LIKE THAT, Y'KNOW?

A PART OF THAT IS AN ACTUAL BATTLE WITH A MANIFESTATION OF WHATEVER DARKNESS WE CAN FIND IN YOUR SOUL.

IT'S A CONQUERING OF FLAWS. IT'S WHAT TURNS TRAGIC, ORDINARY HEROES INTO THE THINGS OF LEGENDS.

SO, WHAT, YOU'RE SAYING I'M MY WORST ENEMY?

NOT AS SUCH, NO.

THE ONLY THING WE HAVE ON RECORD EVIL ENOUGH TO REPRESENT YOUR SINS IS, WE..., *YOU*.

I THINK I'M FLATTERED

IT'S FAIRLY UNPRECEDENTED

SO YOU'RE, LIKE, ALL MY SINS, AND EVIL, AND WRONG-DOING MADE REAL?

PRETTY MUCH.

INCLUDING WHEN I RULED HE... FOR 20 MINUTES?

NO.

WHY AM I RUMBLING INTERNALLY?

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HUH.

YEAH

SO...

WHAT ABOUT WHEN I ORPHANED THAT KID?

TWICE.

[illegible]

ELSEWHERE

BAH!

I KILLED THE LAST RANDOM ENCOUNTER *WITH MY MIND*

IS NOT A MAN JUDGED BY HIS ACTIONS? THUS YOU HAVE SHOWN THAT HUBRIS IS YOUR UNDOING. AND SO THE ORDEAL OF PRIDE IS UPON YOU

BAM!

HUBRIS?

MY DEAR HIDEOUS THING, YOU'VE MADE A *GRAVE* TACTICAL ERROR ON THIS DAY

CLEARLY, I LACK ARROGANCE AS THAT WOULD BE A *FLAW*

WELL? GET ON WITH IT *EXPLODE* ALREADY

WHAT ABOUT WHEN I--

YOU SHOULD STOP TALKING

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HEY HERE'S A QUESTION.

I FEEL A COMPLETE CONTEMPT FOR EVERYTHING AND THE OVERRIDING NEED TO BURN THE WORLD IS THAT NORMAL?

ARE YOU FILLED WITH REGRET THAT, EVENTUALLY, THERE WON'T BE MORE WORLD TO BURN?

IN THE BACK YEAH

THAT SOUNDS LIKE MY ATROCITIES, ALL RIGHT

PERFECTLY NORMAL.

MORAL QUANDARIES HAVE LOST ALL MEANING THE COMPLEXITIES OF LIFE HAVE SIMPLE VIOLENT ANSWERS I HAVE TO ADMIT IT'S LIBERATING

YOU KNOW I'VE NEVER BEEN FACED WITH THE SHEER SCALE OF THE HORROR I'VE BROUGHT INTO BEING.

IT PUTS THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN

THE WANTS NEEDS AND RIGHTS OF OTHERS NO LONGER MAKE SENSE

IF YOU ARE MY EVIL MADE REAL, THEN DEFEATING YOU WOULD BE A SELF-EXORCISM. I'D BE CLEANSED

THAT'S THE IDEA.

THEN I KNOW WHAT I MUST DO.

I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK THAT INDISCRIMINATE MURDER IS THE ONLY VIABLE SOLUTION HERE

THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT

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NOW THAT'S A NEW ONE

THERE IS GOING TO BE SO MUCH GOD DAMNED PAPER-WORK

MAYBE I'LL LIE AND SAY HE PASSED THE ORDEAL

AND THEN GLRKFH

HIYA.

NEXT TIME CHECK FOR A PULSE OR AT LEAST MAKE SURE THE GUY ISN'T HOLDING THE BLADE WITH HIS ARMPIT.

THUS, AS YOU CAN PLAINLY SEE, I HAVE BALANCED EVERY NUANCE OF MY CHARACTER TO PERFECTLY COMPLEMENT EVERY OTHER FACET

I'VE EXPLOITED EVERY RULE IN THE BOOK TO ERADICATE THE VERY NOTION OF FLAWS.

LOOK ON MY CHARACTER SHEET, YE MIGHTY, AND DESPAIR!

THERE'S STILL THE MATTER OF HUBRIS.

HAVE YOU HEARD NOTHING I'VE SAID?!

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SOME PEOPLE WRESTLE WITH THEIR PERSONAL DEMONS

HE WAS A BLEEDER

I STABBED HIM IN THE BACK OF THE HEAD

IN THE MOMENT, I THINK IT WAS ALMOST ALCOHOLICS CALL AN EPIPHANY

EXCEPT I'M MORE A MURDERHOLIC

SO, Y'KNOW, THE FACE-STABBING.

BUT, LET'S FACE IT THIS IS A FANTASY SETTING. INTERNAL CONFLICTS ALWAYS HAVE EXTERNAL METAPHORS.

AND *THIS* DRAGON WAS MY OWN PHILOSOPHY I REJECTED EVERYTHING IT WAS. EVERYTHING I WAS.

IT'S LEFT ME... CALM.

IT'S LIKE I'M A CLEAN SLATE I'M FREE TO START OVER AGAIN.

THANK THE NUMBERLESS LORDS OF CHAOS I HAD THE SENSE TO SET THIS UP AHEAD OF TIME

YOU WANT HUMILITY?

I'LL *SHOW* YOU HUMILITY ON A SCALE YOU CAN SCARELY COMPREHEND

LET THIS SHEET BELOW UNTO THE HEAVENS THEMSELVES THAT RED MAGE IS THE MOST HUMBLE MAN TO WALK UPON EARTH!

EVER!!

LITERAL ADHERENCE TO A LAW MEANS LITTLE WITHOUT RESPECT FOR THE *SPIRIT* OF THAT LAW

Red Mage Humble +2000

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I'VE ABSORBED ALL THE AMBIENT EVIL LEFT OVER FROM MY HORRID DOPPEL-GANGER.

THUS AVOIDING ALL POSSIBILITY OF REDEMPTION!

STILL.

I DON'T QUITE FEEL COMPLETE.

WHAT'S A GUY GOTTA DO TO BE ABHORRENT AROUND THESE PARTS?

I MEAN, ANY SIN WORTH DOING NEEDS A VICTIM.

BUT I HAVE NO IDEA WHERE EVERYONE IS.

AND I *HAVE* BEEN MEANING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO TURN SELF-LOVE INTO AN ATROCITY...

FINE, I RELENT!

YOUR ACCURSED TRIAL HAS BESTED ME. *ME!*

I NOW KNOW, *FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE,* THE BARBS OF FAILURE

I CANNOT DEFEAT YOU, ORDEAL. I AM UNDONE.

AND SO YOU PASS.

OF COURSE

IT'S ALL SO PAINFULLY OBVIOUS.

I OUT-SMARTED THE ORDEAL.

CLEARLY, I'M *SO* BRILLIANT, MY MIND WORKS ON LEVELS I DON'T EVEN KNOW ABOUT!

MAN, I CAN'T WAIT TO BRAG ABOUT THIS TO EVERYONE I KNOW!

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SARA! SARA, DEAR! I'VE INVENTED SOMETHING AGAIN!

WHAT IS IT, DAD?

AS YOU KNOW, I'M THE WORLD'S FOREMOST INVENTOR, HAVING INVENTED INVENTING THREE YEARS AGO.

OKAY, SURE.

TODAY I INVENTED A NEW HOLIDAY

I SEE...

DON'T TELL ME. IT INVOLVES COSTUMES AND THE ACQUISITION OF CANDIES.

THAT SOUNDS REMARKABLY LIKE HALLOWEEN, SARA.

THAT WAS *YESTERDAY'S* INVENTION.

AH YES. HOW SILLY OF ME.

NO. THIS NEW HOLIDAY INVOLVES DRESSING UP, AND GOING TO YOUR NEIGHBORS', AND DEMANDING GOODS.

ONLY THERE'S JUST THE ONE COSTUME: A CORNERIAN SOLDIER

AND WE SEND ABOUT THIRTY THOUSAND OF THEM TO OUR NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES.

AND THERE ARE NO TRICKS OR TREATS, JUST RAPE AND MURDER

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I JUST WISH THERE WERE SOME GIRLS IN THIS ARMY

ORDERS ARE ORDERS, SOLDIER!

WOW. I MANAGED TO REARRANGE REALITY ON A QUANTUM LEVEL TO PUT US ALL IN THIS ROOM AT THE SAME TIME!

OH. I WAS STARTING TO THINK THAT TAPPING THESE COLUMNS DID SOMETHING.

NO, THAT'S JUST STUPID ALSO, NEVER TOUCH COLUMNS.

OF COURSE, NOW THE QUESTION IS WHERE D THIEF GO?

BETTER QUESTION. WHO CARES?

MY DRAMATIC POSE DEMANDS ANSWERS!

HEY GUYS.

DOES THE UNIVERSE EXIST ONLY TO ROB ME OF ANY JOY?

IT'D BE NICE TO HAVE CONFIRMATION ON THAT

YOUR JOY IS ONE OF MANY THINGS I [redacted].

THERE'S ALSO YOUR DIGNITY

OR, FOR EXAMPLE, YOUR MONEY, AS IN ***BLACK MAIL*** TO KEEP THESE NEGATIVES OF WHAT HAPPENED IN THE NEW "ATROCITY" ROOM PRIVATE

THIS IS EXTORTION.

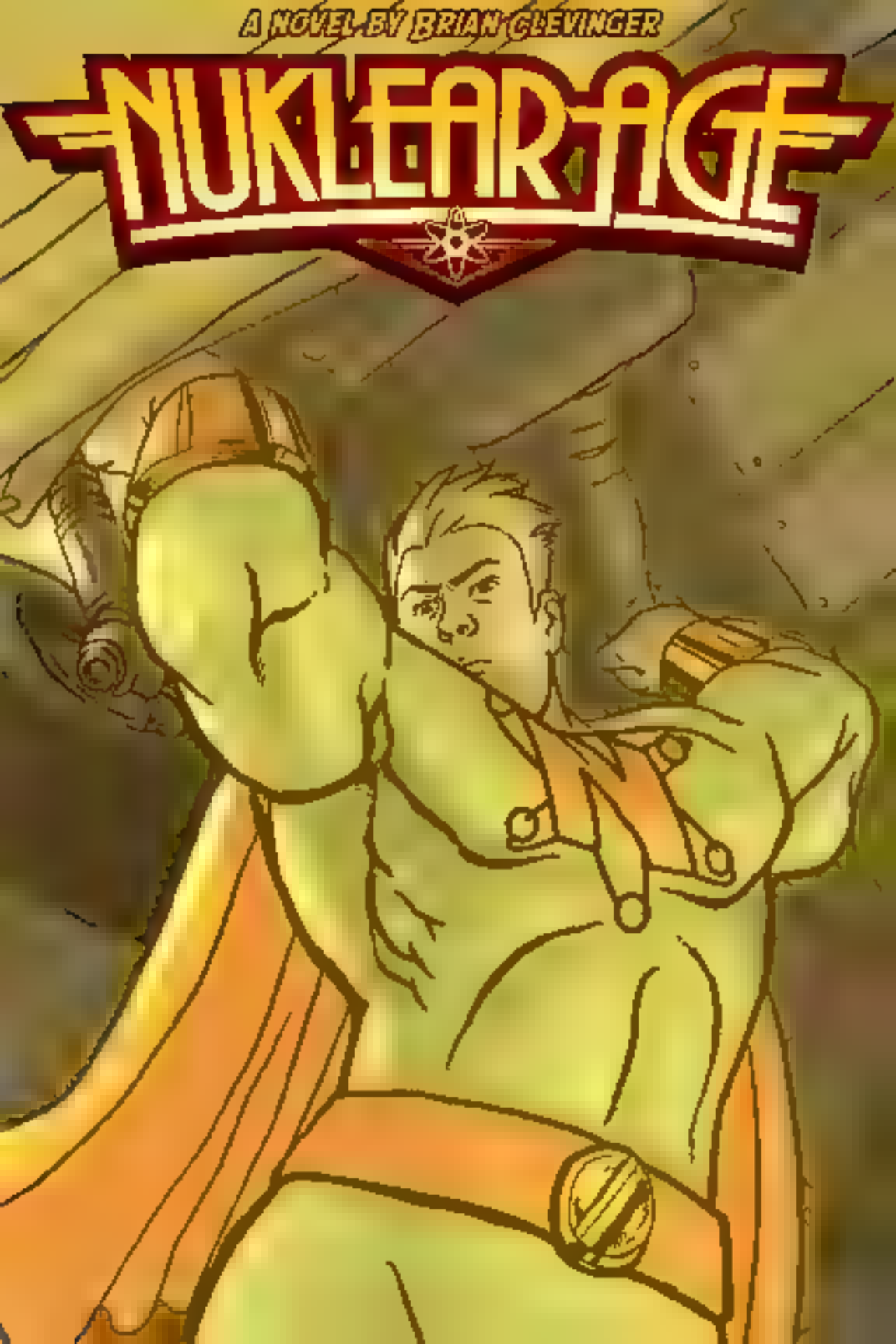
AND PAR FOR THE COURSE!

AT LEAST WE'RE TOGETHER AGAIN AND THERE'S NO MORE ORDEALS FOREVER

POOF?!

A NOVEL BY BRIAN CLEVINGER

NUKLEAR AGE



JUST SO WE'RE ALL ON THE SAME PAGE, THIS ISN'T CREDIBLE FOSSIL EVIDENCE OF DRAGONS.

IT'S OBVIOUSLY A FISH REASSEMBLED INTO A DRAGON-LIKE FORM TO TRICK RUBES

SUCH AS YOURSELVES.

THE FOUR STRUGGLED AGAINST AND ***OVERCAME*** THEIR WORST FEARS, AND THEIR MOST CRIPPLING FLAWS.

THAT IS SO TRUE IN A COMPLETELY LITERAL WAY

IN FACT, WE SHOULD MOVE ON AND NOT SCRUTINIZE THIS POINT ANY FURTHER

NOW THAT THE FOUR ARE UNIFIED ONCE AGAIN, THEY FACE THEIR ***GREATEST*** CHALLENGE

WHY IS HE TALKING ABOUT US LIKE WE'RE NOT HERE?

IT'S JUST RUDE

YOU MUST BE MORE THAN THE SUM OF YOUR PARTS. YOU MUST TRANSCEND INDIVIDUALITY

YOU MUST EACH BECOME THE OTHER

ONLY IN THIS WAY WILL YOU DEFEAT THE FINAL ORDEAL SET BEFORE YOU.

OH, GOD DAMMIT

I KNEW THIS WHOLE THING WAS GOING TO TURN INTO A HIPPY LOVE-IN FRIENDSHIP HUG-A-THON.

SO WHAT IS THE FINAL ORDEAL?

'CAUSE IF IT'S LIKING EACH OTHER, WE ARE [illegible].

THE ORDEAL OF DEFEATING A GIANT ZOMBIE DRAGON, NATCH!

I LIKE YOU GUYS.

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I FAIL TO SEE THE THEMATIC SIGNIFICANCE OF A ZOMBIFIED DRAGON VIS-A-VIS OUR EXTERNALIZED STRUGGLES WITH OUR OWN INTERNAL DEMONS.

MAYBE THE BONE DRAGON REPRESENTS OUR ***SKELETONS***.

THOSE ARE INSIDE OF US.

LIKE A SKELETON.

THANKS, FIGHTER. IT'S A TREAT THAT ***EVERY*** DAY OF MY LIFE IS ALSO THE ***STUPIDEST*** DAY OF MY LIFE.

SO STUPID IT'S GENIUS!

I HAVE A PLAN!

OH, GOOD. I WAS TIRED OF LIFE.

LOOK, THIS COULDN'T BE SIMPLER. I DON'T KNOW IF YOU GUYS HAVE NOTICED, BUT HISTORICALLY OUR ADVERSARIES HAVE NOT BEEN THE MOST COMPETENT BUNCH OF GUYS.

THIS WILL SURELY BE NO DIFFERENT

AT LAST!

I ***KNEW*** THERE WAS SOMETHING MORE TO MY TRIP TO THE BEGINNING OF THE UNIVERSE.

IT REMINDED ME OF BLACK BELT'S MOST EGREGIOUS VIOLATION OF CAUSALITY

I CAN BRING HIM BACK

I CAN FIX EVERYTHING.

OKAY, SO HE'S A LITTLE MORE HEADLESS THAN I REMEMBER. NOT A PROBLEM.

I'M A HEALER, THIS IS WHAT I DO.

ER...

OH, GOD, WHAT HAVE I ***DONE***?

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IT'S CLEARLY AN ELABORATE HOAX MEANT TO FOOL US INTO THINKING THAT GIANT LIZARDS USED TO ROAM THE EARTH.

ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS TAKE OUT THE PINS THAT ARE HOLDING IT TOGETHER. THE END!

YOU GUYS DISTRACT IT, I'LL HANDLE THE REST

IT'S A BAD SIGN WHEN YOUR LEADER'S WHOLE EXIT STRATEGY IS TO SCREW YOU.

I DON'T SAY THIS OFTEN ENOUGH: I HATE THIEF

WHAT? YOU SAY IT LIKE EVERY DAY

I HATE THIEF

HATE THIEF

I HATE THIEF

I'M NOT SAYING IT, BUT I'M *THINKING* IT.

I DON'T KNOW HOW OR WHY, BUT THIEF IS BEHIND ALL OF THIS.

DAMMIT, THIEF

NOT OFTEN ENOUGH.

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ENOUGH TALKING!

SERIOUSLY ENOUGH!

THIS IS THE FINAL ORDEAL! YOU DON'T GET TO DEBATE!

BUT WHAT IF *WE* WERE A DEBATE CLUB?

THAT'S NOT THE POINT

IS THERE NO DEBATE CLUB CONTINGENCY IN EFFECT?

OKAY THEY'D HAVE TO RESEARCH AN ISSUE, SAY, THE MERITS OF A MASS TRANSIT SYSTEM IN THEIR HOMETOWN, AND THEN ARGUE ***AGAINST*** THAT

I COULD NEVER DO IT MYSELF

I'D ALWAYS INTERNALIZE THE SIDE I'D RESEARCHED PROPAGANDISTS LOVE ME

THIS IS THE BURIAL WE COULD NEVER GATHER ENOUGH PIECES OF YOU TO PERFORM UNTIL [illegible].

I'M SO SORRY, BLACK BELT

I ONLY WANTED TO SAVE YOU.

SOME GREAT HEALER I TURNED OUT TO BE

SO FAR ALL I'VE DONE IS KILL A GOOD MAN. TWICE.

WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?

I WISH HE'D STOP DOING THAT

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READY.. NOW!

BAH, MY FEET CAN'T MOVE!

HASTE! HASTE! HASTE! HASTE! HASTE!

I FAIL TO SEEJUSTWHAT THISISSUPPOSEDTO DO.

OOYOU HONESTLY

WITH THAT MUCH HASTE BUILD UP, OUR UNDEAD AND SKELETAL FRIEND SHOULD BE FOSSIL FUEL IN A FEW SECONDS.

I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M SAYING THIS WITHOUT A HINT OF SARCASM, BUT I'M IMPRESSED

OH, YES. IT WOULD BE A ***STUNNING*** VICTORY TO BE SUNG ABOUT FOR AGES IF HASTE SPELLS WORKED LIKE THAT

WHAT

STACKED HASTE SPELLS ONLY INCREASE THE OVERALL DURATION, NOT THE POTENCY

BUT HE'S SUPER-ACCELERATED INTO A RED SHIFT

I JUST WANTED TO SEE WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE IF PHYSICS WORKED THAT WAY

TELL THE TRUTH, PRETTY CONVINCING ILLUSION SPELL, WASN'T IT?

ARE YOU QUITE DONE?

YES.

POSSIBLY

POSSIBLY?

IT MAY BE THAT WE ARE MERELY STALLING YOU.

AN ADMIRABLE STRATAGEM, BUT ALSO A FUTILE ONE.

HAVE YOU ANY IDEA HOW OLD I AM?

IM BASICALLY A DRAGON LICH. STARS ARE MERE TODDLERS COMPARED TO ME

DO YOU THINK I COULD BE SO EASILY FOOLED BY MORTALS? I'M THE FINAL ORDEAL, NOT SOME RUN OF THE MILL RANDOM ENCOUNTER WITH AN ORC.

HE'S GOT A POINT DEFEATING HIM WOULD TAKE CUNNING AND GUILE.

LIKE PUTTING ON AN ELABORATE HOAX TO DISTRACT HIM FROM REMOVING ALL HIS PINS.

FOOL, ELF! I AM NO MERE MUSEUM PIECE!

YEAH, SO I REMOVED THREE VERTEBRAE INSTEAD.

OH BUGGER

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I HAVE DISPOSED OF THE ZOMBIE DRAGON'S REMAINS IN THE ANCIENT WAYS.

HIS BONES I SCATTERED AND BROKE BEFORE I BURIED THEM.

HIS HEAD WAS BURIED UPSIDE DOWN AT A CROSS ROADS.

I ADDED THE UPSIDE DOWN PART AS AN EXTRA MEASURE

IDEALLY, THIS IS HOW WE WOULD DEAL WITH ALL OF OUR ENEMIES.

MEANWHILE, I HAVE PLUNDERED THE ROOM'S TREASURE CHEST AND FOUND "NOTHING."

SAY THAT LAST PART AGAIN.

WHAT? THAT I FOUND "NOTHING."

THERE! WHY ARE YOU SAYING THAT FUNNY?

I "DON'T KNOW" WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT

YOU'RE STILL DOING IT!

NO, I'M "NOT."

BY WHAT DEFINITION OF NOTHING ARE YOU GOING.. BY

THE "STANDARD" ONE.

HOWEVER, IF IT'LL DISTRACT YOU FROM MY LIES, I FOUND A REALLY GROSS SEVERED TAIL.

SOUNDS USELESS *AND* FLAMMABLE

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NOOOOOOOOO.

UM..?

SORRY, I WAS TRYING TO INDICATE THAT WE SHOULD SAVE THE GROSS SEVERED TAIL.

AND THE FAKE SLO-MO VOICE?

DRAMATIC EFFECT

AND I GUESS THAT'S, WHAT, FEATHER FALL TO MAKE IT *LOOK* LIKE YOU WERE JUMPING THROUGH THE AIR IN SLOW MOTION TOO?

SORTA. MOSTLY I JUST DIDN'T WANT TO HURT MYSELF ON LANDING.

I THINK I CAST TOO MUCH OF IT COULD YOU GUYS GIVE ME A HAND?

GUYS?

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HEY, GUYS. GUESS YOU DIDN'T HEAR MY CRIES FOR HELP OR THE GENTLE SOBS. BUT IT'S COOL, I'M BACK.

YOU TOLD ME RED MAGE WAS DEAD

OH, WE'VE ALL BEEN DEAD HIS RETURN IS NO SURPRISE, REALLY

BUT YOU SAID HE'D TURN INTO THE WALK-ING DEAD ANY MINUTE AND WE HAD TO MAKE HASTE SO HE COULDN'T FEAST UPON OUR DELICIOUS LIVING FLESH.

LOOK, I SAY A *LOT* OF THINGS.

NOW, WE CAN STAND HERE AND ARGUE ABOUT WHO FED WHO OBVIOUS, COMPLETELY INCONGRUOUS FABRICATIONS AND LIES

BUT ARE YOU PREPARED TO RISK THE UNRELENTING HUNGER OF THE UNDEAD?

ALL THIS SENSELESS TALKING ABOUT A SUBJECT NO ONE CAN REMEMBER MUCH LESS, UH, ***REMEMBER*** IS GETTING US NOWHERE, AND ZOMBIES ARE HOT ON OUR HEELS.

WE MUST MOVE FORWARD AND ONWARD!

AND FORWARD

BUT IN AN ONWARD MANNER, OF COURSE!

WATCHING YOU MANIPULATE HIM MUST BE WHAT IT'S LIKE FOR EVERYONE ELSE TO WATCH ME TALK TO PEOPLE.

HOW SO?

TOTA...Y BACK

GIMME A DOLLAR AND I'...L TE... YOU.

OKAY!

THANKS.

WHY DID I DO THAT?

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WHERE HAVE YOU KIDS BEEN?

WHERE ARE THE REPLACEMENT PARTS? MY FEET HURT

WHO'S GOING TO REPAIR MY TOWER?

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT AN EYESORE THAT AIRSHIP IS?

WHO SMELLS LIKE CHEESE?

I ORDERED TEA AN HOUR AGO AND IT NEVER CAME. THIS SORT OF THING WOULD NEVER HAPPEN WITH A REPUBLICAN IN OFFICE.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

ARE WE MOVING?

WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, EVERYTHING WAS BETTER

MOSTLY BECAUSE YOU COULD BE OPENLY RACIST AND THERE WEREN'T ANY GAYS.

WHAT'S THAT ROARING NOISE?

THERE'S A DRAFT IN HERE.

I NEVER GOT THAT TEA.

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YOU PUSHED HIM OUT THE AIR-LOCK!

I DID NO SUCH THING.

HE JUST HAPPENED TO STUMBLE OUT OF THE AIRLOCK RIGHT AFTER I PUSHED HIM.

THAT *IS* A LITERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE EVENTS I SAW

AND DO I EVER LIE?

ACCORDING TO YOU, YOU *NEVER* DO!

OKAY THEN.

I JUST CHECKED THE NAVIGATIONAL LOG.

A FEW THINGS OCCUR TO ME

SHOOT

ONE. THIS *IS* NOT A VERY GOOD SHIP

NAVAGASHUN

TWO: WHY IS THIS THING RETURNING TO CARDIA?

SOME OF US ARE INTERESTED IN GAINING POWER. TO THAT END: RETURNING THE RAT TAIL TO CARDIA.

EVERY DAY WITH YOU MARKS A NEW LOW

TEN MINUTES LATER

HELLO, NEW SET OF RICH, LOVING ADOPTIVE PARENTS!

I'M..

HOME...?

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HOW DO WE KNOW WE EVEN HAVE THE RIGHT RAT TAIL?

YEAH. IT'S A BIG OVERWORLD THERE COULD BE, Y'KNOW, SEVERAL TAILS.

TRUE, BUT DO *THEY* DO THIS?

RAT TAILS

GOOD POINT

GLOWING RAT TAILS ASIDE, I'M ONLY ALLOWING THIS TO PROVE THAT THERE ARE NO DRAGONS.

WE'VE BEEN STOMPING AROUND THIS JUNGLE SO LONG I'M STARTING TO HAVE MY DOUBTS, AND I'VE *SEEN* THE JERK

WE THERE YET?

IF IT WERE ANY MORE HUMID, WE'D BE SWIMMING.

IT SHOULDN'T BE MUCH FURTHER. MAYBE ANOTHER MILE.

MAYBE LESS.

WELCOME BACK.

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HA! SEE? DRAGON!

DRAGON GOD-KING, REALLY.

YOU PATHETIC DOPES.

THIS IS NOTHING MORE THAN A DUMMY, AND IT'S RATHER CRUDELY ARTICULATED IF I DO SAY SO MY-SELF

ONE SWIFT KICK WHERE ITS GENITALS WOULD BE IF IT WERE REAL OUGHT TO MAKE THINGS CLEAR

BUT THIEF—!

NO. I NEED THIS.

I CAN'T WATCH.

HM, IT'S STURDIER THAN IT LOOKS.

SO PLAYING ITS HOLLOW SKULL LIKE THE BONGOS WILL PROVE MY POINT

SLICING ITS WINGS.

FLIPPING ITS EARS

SETTING IT AFLAME

ANY MORE BRIGHT IDEAS?

YEAH, A FEW.

GIVE ME A MINUTE TO CATCH MY BREATH.

THEN LET'S CLIMB OUT AND COLLECT ANIMAL FECES FROM THE JUNGLE.

NO, I DON'T THINK YOU'LL BE DOING THAT.

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I HAVE COME TO A REALIZA-TION.

[redacted] ARE NOT REAL IN A GENERAL SENSE, BUT THEY MAY EXIST IN CERTAIN SPECIFIC CASES.

LIKE HOW QUANTUM MECHANICS DESCRIBES HOW SUBATOMIC PARTICLES CAN SPONTANEOUSLY POP INTO EXISTENCE AT RANDOM!

NO, THAT'S STUPID AND STOP MAKING UP WORDS.

BAHAMUT, WHATEVER MEGAPOWER YOU WERE GOING TO GIVE THE NONBELIEVER BEFORE HE INSULTED YOU, FEEL FREE TO PUMP ME UP WITH IT

I REALLY DON'T MIND

I REALLY, REALLY, *REALLY* DON'T MIND.

HAVE YOU THE PRECIOUS ITEM?

WE HAVE

I MEAN, Y'KNOW, *REALLY*

THEN GIVE IT UNTO ME!

SURE THING.

RAT TAIL

IS THAT THE RAT TAIL?

FINALLY, TIME FOR SOUP!

WELL NOW I DON'T KNOW *WHAT* TO BELIEVE.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE?

SOME GOOD OLD FASHIONED HOME COOKING, THAT'S WHAT

LET ME PUT IT ANOTHER WAY

WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE?

WHAT?

CAN'T A BLIND WITCH MAKE STEW OUT OF A LONG EXTINCT RODENT TAIL FOR HER IMMORTAL REPTILE BOYFRIEND?

WORLDS ARE COLLIDING.

USUALLY THREE TIMES A NIGHT

I'M GOING TO THROW UP NOW.

ON THE OFF CHANCE THERE'S A KIND AND LOVING GOD, I WILL CHOKE ON MY OWN VOMIT DO **NOT** HELP

LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT

YOU HAD US TREK ACROSS THE GLOBE TO CONFRONT UNSPEAKABLE DANGERS AND OUR INNERMOST FAILINGS FOR, OF ALL THINGS, *SOUP*?

IT'S NOT *JUST* SOUP

IT'S A VERY POTENT VIRILITY DRUG TOO!

OH GOD NOW I'M EJECTING THINGS I HAVEN'T EATEN YET

MAYBE WE SHOULD GET OFF THIS SUBJECT

THAT'S FINE, I JUST GOT—

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MY MIND IS TOO FRACTURED TO CONTEMPLATE THE FULL HORROR OF WHAT WE HAVE UNCOVERED HERE TODAY, YET I MUST PRESS ON.

YOU'LL DOOM US ALL, MAN!

THERE ARE *THINGS*, SPIDERY AND ELUSIVE, THAT ARE MEANT NOT TO BE KNOWN BY MORTALS!

AND THAT, THIEF, IS WHY I MUST CAST THE LIGHT OF KNOWLEDGE INTO THOSE SHADOWS! KNOWLEDGE IS ALL WE HAVE!

TIS THE CREDO OF THE RED MAGE.

I'LL HAVE NO PART OF THIS.

YOUR PARTICIPATION IS NOT A REQUIREMENT!

TO WIT!

HOW THE *HELL* DID YOU TWO MEET, ANYWAY?

THERE'S AN ENTIRE CAVE-DWELLING RECLUSE SUBCULTURE OUT THERE.

WE EVEN HAVE A CONVENTION.

CAVECON '98

ATTENDANCE COULD BE BETTER, I MUST ADMIT

THEY'RE RECLUSES, YOU SEE

I THINK I GET IT, YEAH.

THEY WOULDN'T GO OUTSIDE

RIGHT WE CAN MOVE ON.

MAKES YOU WONDER WHO WOULD FINANCE SUCH A THING.

HEY, NEW CREDO: KNOWLEDGE SUCKS.

YOU KNOW WHAT I HEARD? I HEARD THIS CRAZY RUMOR ABOUT A CLASS CHANGE. DID YOU GUYS HEAR ABOUT THAT?

I HEARD THINGS.

THERE *WAS* TALK OF GREAT POWER

BAHAMUT, [illegible].

THE [illegible] WARRIORS WANT TO SPEAK WITH YOU.

LIGHT WARRIORS, MA'AM. WE'RE THE *LIGHT* WARRIORS.

OF COURSE YOU ARE, DEARY. OF COURSE YOU ARE.

WHAT DO THEY WANT?

WE WERE PROMISED CERTAIN *RECOMPENSES* FOR SERVICES RENDERED, I.E. MANY INCREDIBLE POWERS.

CAN WE GET THIS DONE QUICKLY?

[illegible] SOMEONE (MATOYA) SAYS SOMETHING *HORRIBLE* AGAIN.

OH, RIGHT. THAT.

LET ME FINISH MY RAT SOUP.

OH, YES! *PLEASE!*

HE *MUST* BE ALLOWED TO FINISH THE SOUP

YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT IT WILL DO FOR HIM.

THOUGH I AM PREPARED TO GO INTO A FRANK AND GRAPHIC DISCUSSION ABOUT IT

RIGHT NOW, I'D BE HAPPY WITH THE POWER TO STAB OUT MY MIND'S EYE.

CAN WE GET A FULL ROUND OF THAT?

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OKAY.

LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH BEFORE THE SOUP KICKS IN.

QUICKLY. THE LESS WE LEARN ABOUT REPTILIAN REPRODUCTION, THE BETTER.

I USED TO THINK LIKE THAT

LET'S FACE IT. WE'VE ALREADY UNCOVERED TOO MUCH. THERE'S NO GOING BACK NOW.

THE HERALDS OF LIGHT ARE ALL WHICH STANDS BETWEEN LIFE AND ULTIMATE DESOLATION.

EACH OF YOU HAS PROVEN TO BE AN ENLIGHTENED WARRIOR.

YOU ARE HEROES. YOU WALK IN THE ECHOES OF... OF. HEY, DID ANYONE ELSE FEEL THAT? OR THAT?

OH, THIS IS GOING TO GET SOCIALLY AWKWARD IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE.

DROZZLE, DRAZZLE, DRUZZLE, DRASS, TIME FOR THESE GUYS TO CHANGE CLASS!

WE *REALLY* NEED TO SPEED THIS UP.

COULD *NOT* AGREE MORE.

SPOING!

"SPOING?"

I ASSUME YOU'RE KIDDING.

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THIS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE THE SINGLE GREATEST MOMENT OF OUR LIVES.

NEXT TO KILLING ALL OF YOU, BURNING THE WORLD IN SACRIFICE TO MY DARK GOD, AND MAKING WHITE MAGE QUEEN OF MY KINGDOM OF DECAY

OH, I'M SORRY. ARE WE SUPPOSED TO BE IMPRESSED BY NON SEQUITURS LIKE THAT?

BECAUSE I HAVE A HARD TIME BEING INTIMIDATED BY INCOMPETENCE

YOUR **HYGIENE** HOWEVER..

SPELL COMPONENTS!

I'VE NEVER SEEN YOU **USE** SPELL COMPONENTS.

I HAVE A FEW

LIKE HERBS OR MAYBE DRIED EYEBALLS AND THINGS. YOU DON'T KNOW!

SEEMS FUNNY THAT YOU **SAY** YOU HAVE THESE THINGS, WHEN I'VE **NEVER** SEEN THEM.

CAN WE GET BACK TO THE SUBJECT AT HAND?

YOUR INCOMPETENCE?

YOUR INCOMPETENCE!

CAREFUL GUYS, DON'T CUT YOURSELVES ON HIS WIT

THE **POINT** IS THAT WE WERE PROMISED INCREDIBLE POWER AND ALL WE GOT WAS A BRAIN FULL OF TRAUMATIC IMAGES.

BECAUSE OF **HIM!**

AHEM...

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HE HAS DONE NOTHING BUT SCREW US OVER

NOT TRUE. THAT'S SIMPLY NOT TRUE.

THERE WAS THAT NICE LUNCH.

REMEMBER? WE HAD THOSE SANDWICHES.

SANDWICHES, YEAH.

WAS THAT BEFORE YOU TRIED TO FIGHT ***WEREWOLVES*** BY YOURSELF?

MAYBE IT WAS AFTER YOU TRIED TO KEEP US WARM WITH [illegible].

IT COULD HAVE BEEN AT SOME POINT IN BETWEEN.

WASN'T IT AFTER THE SHOE SANDWICHES RED MAGE MADE FOR US?

IT ***WAS*** THE SHOE SAND-WICHES!

AND THEY DIDN'T KILL US!

YOU GUYS NEVER THANKED ME FOR THAT.

DO I REALLY NEED TO WASTE MY BREATH MAKING A CASE HERE?

BECAUSE, REALLY, THERE'S NOTHING ELSE TO SAY

OTHER THAN..

HADOKEN!

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THAT WAS REFRESHING

YOU KILLED OUR AIRSHIP, BLACK MAGE.

WAIT FOR IT

LET THIS BE A LESSON TO THE REST OF YOU. IF YOU CROSS ME, YOU WILL BE DEALT WITH.

POW

COUGH?

OH, PEOPLE COUGH FOR HOURS AFTER THEY DIE EVERYONE KNOWS ABOUT THAT

AND STAND UP

AND.. CHANGE THEIR CLOTHES?

IT'S OBVIOUS WHAT HAPPENED

RED MAGE WAS COMPLETELY VAPORIZED

THE GODS PROVIDED A NEW ONE FOR REASONS WE CAN ONLY ASSUME HAVE TO DO WITH KILLING HIM AGAIN.

LUCKILY WE ALREADY KNOW HIS TRICKS SO THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT

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EXPLANATIONS!

I...

I DON'T *KNOW*

JUST BY WATCHING IT, IT WAS LIKE I KNEW HOW TO CAST IT.

IT WAS SO OBVIOUS, SO S.MPLE. IT HAD TO BE MADE MANI-FEST

SO, WHAT, YOU CHANGE CLOTHES AND SUDDENLY YOU'RE A MASTER OF LOST MAGIC? I DON'T BUY IT

WHAT SHOULD THAT MEAN TO THOSE OF US WHO DIDN'T WASTE OUR LIVES NERDING IT UP IN A W.ZARD'S CONVENT?

DISREGARDING YOUR GROSS IGNORANCE OF MAGE ARCHITECTURAL NAMING SCHEMA.

IT SOUNDS LIKE HE'S TALKING ABOUT BLUE MAGIC. BUT THAT'S A MYTH.

HOLD ON. YOU CAN'T CAST BLUE MAGIC. YOU'RE WEARING RED

SO ARE YOU.

WAIT. WA.T. WA.T *WAIT*

WAIT

WAIT

WAIT

WAIT

SO. MOVING ON.

THERE'S BLUE MAGIC NOW?

THERE ALWAYS HAS BEEN.

OR, MORE ACCURATELY, THERE NEVER WAS.

THANKS FOR CLEARING THAT UP

WAIT

OKAY, YEAH. MY MIND IS SO TOTALLY BLOWN.

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DON'T YOU SEE?

THE CLASS CHANGE **WAS** REAL! I'M AN ENLIGHTENED WARBLOCK.

IT'S ONLY NATURAL THAT I, RED MAGE, A FRACTACTICAL ***GENIUS*** —

TOLD YOU!

— WOULD BE GRANTED THE ABILITY TO USE ABILITIES I DON'T ACTUALLY HAVE!

YOU'RE MAKING AS MUCH SENSE AS EVER, SO WHATEVER HAPPENED, IT DIDN'T FIX YOU.

BLUE MAGIC ISN'T REAL. I WANT TO KNOW WHERE YOU REALLY GOT THAT HADOKEN. SO START TALKIN'

FROM THE POWER!

WHAT POWER?

THE POWER OF VOODOO.

WHO DO?

YOU DO!

DO WHAT?

HAVE THE POWER OF AN ENLIGHTENED WARRIOR!

CAN WE TRY THAT AGAIN, ONLY ***WITHOUT*** THE STUPID PARTS THIS TIME?

I'M SAYING WE ALL GOT A CLASS CHANGE

HOW CAN YOU TELL?

IT'S THE ***INEVITABLE*** RESULT OF POWER CREEP

OUR LIVES WERE STRICTLY MAIN BOOK TERRITORY WHERE EVERYTHING WAS IN BALANCE

BUT NOW WE'VE VENTURED INTO AN EXPANSION. ALL NEW, ***ABSURDLY*** POWERFUL OCCUPATIONAL CHARACTER CLASSES ARE NOW AVAILABLE

AND WHERE DOES THIS ALLEGED POWER CREEP COME FROM?

RIFTS® IN SPACE-TIME, MOSTLY.

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CAN SOMEONE TELL ME WHAT BLUE MAGIC IS SO I CAN JOIN IN DISMISSING RED MAGE?

IT'S SIMPLE

MAGIC IS CHANGE, RIGHT? WHEN YOU CAST A SPELL, YOU ARE FORCING YOUR WILL ONTO THE WAY OF THINGS.

WHITE MAGIC TENDS TO INTRODUCE ORDER INTO A SYSTEM WHILE BLACK MAGIC TENDS TO ENCOURAGE DECAY

WHAT ABOUT RED MAGIC?

ACTUALLY THAT'S A MISNOMER. THE FOUNDER OF THE RED MAGE SCHOOL WAS VERMILLION WIZARD DUDE JUST LIKED RED

SO A THOUSAND YEARS AGO, SOME CHUCKLEHEAD GETS THE BRIGHT IDEA THAT IF CASTING MAGIC CHANGES THE EXTERNAL WORLD, THERE OUGHT TO BE CORRESPONDING CHANGES TO ONE'S SELF

HE CALLED IT BLUE MAGIC.

GUY LOOKED *SHARP* IN BLUE.

A SPELL'S ABILITY TO BRING CHANGE INTO THE WORLD WOULD BE INCORPORATED BY ONE'S VERY BEING.

A BLUE MAGE WOULDN'T BE BURNED BY A FIREBALL.

ITS POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE WOULD INSTEAD BECOME A PART OF HIM.

GET ZAPPED WITH A SPELL AND YOU LEARN IT.

SOUNDS HANDY

MORE THAN THAT IT BASICALLY GRANTS INSTANT SPELL COGNITION AS WELL AS IMMUNITY TO THEIR EFFECTS.

YOU'D HAVE A MAGE WHO COULD NEVER BE ATTACKED WITHOUT BECOMING MORE POWERFUL.

IT'S THE HOLY GRAIL OF WIZARDRY

IT'S A CROCK

WANNA BET?

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OH. AH.

DO YOU KNOW HOW I KNEW HE WASN'T DOING BLUE MAGIC?

THERE HAVE BEEN SEVEN DOCUMENTED ATTEMPTS AT ACTUAL BLUE MAGIC.

EACH ONE MET WITH FA..URE THAT CULMINATED IN AN EXPLOS.ON, INCLUDING THE TIME THEY FINALLY STARTED US.NG USELESS NON-FATAL SPE..S THAT DON'T EXPLODE

MAGIC ISN'T FREE.

THERE'S ALWAYS A COST

OF COURSE A LEGEND ABOUT UNLIMITED, FREE POWER WOULD START TO CIRCULATE

CHEMISTS DREAMED OF TURNING LEAD INTO GOLD SAME THING.

IF THERE **WAS** A WAY TO GET MAGIC FOR FREE, DO YOU REALLY THINK I'D HAVE SPENT SO MUCH TIME SACRIF.CING CHI..DREN TO MY DARK GODS?

FOR SPE..S, I MEAN.

OBVIOUSLY THERE'D ST.. BE SACRIFICES.

A HOBBY'S A HOBBY

SO WHATEVER HE **IS** DOING, IT'S NOT BLUE MAGIC, RIGHT?

RIGHT

BUT IT SURE DOES TICKLE!

THIS ONLY RAISES MORE QUESTIONS.

AND CONCERNS.

..IKE WHY CAN'T I REMEMBER HOW TO CAST YOUR HADOKEN ANY MORE?

IDEA!

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THIEF, STEAL SOMETHING FROM ME.

WELL?

SORRY. I ALREADY TOOK EVERYTHING OF VALUE WHEN YOU WERE TURNED AROUND A MINUTE AGO.

ALL YOU HAD LEFT WAS ONE OF THOSE MEMORY SPHERES. HERE.

UH. CAN'T SEEM TO FIND.. JUST HAD THE.

I'VE BEEN THROUGH THE DESERT ON A HORSE WITH NO NAME

WRONG

IT FELT GOOD TO BE OUT OF THE RAIN

IN THE DESERT YOU CAN'T REMEMBER YOUR NAME

TURN IT OFF!

CAUSE HERE AN[illegible] ONE FO[illegible] WE YOU[illegible] PAIN

SORRY.

WHAT IS WITH YOU AND THAT SONG, ANYWAY?

I THINK THE LARGER QUESTION HERE IS HOW DID RED MAGE GET THAT?

THAT'S EASY I TOOK IT FROM THIEF AFTER WATCHING HIM TAKE IT FROM BLACK MAGE.

THAT MAKES NO SENSE.

IT DOES IF HE'S GOT PHOTOGRAPHIC REFLEXES.

WHAT, IS HE GOING TO MIME OUR ENEMIES INTO SUBMISSION NOW?

SUDDENLY MY NEW OUTFIT DOESN'T SEEM UP TO THE TASK.

Great Watching these jerks has only taught me how to fail utterly

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SELF REMEMBER TO GET ASS WAR CREAM F 2Q SMART WART ON MY ASS

SHEESH.

THOSE GUYS CAN SURE SAY A WHOLE LOT WITHOUT SAYING ANYTHING.

I DON'T SEE WHAT THE BIG DEAL IS ANYWAY

SO WE GOT A CLASS CHANGE.

SO WHAT?

IT'S NOT LIKE IT CAN DO ANYTHING FOR ME.

I'M A WIZ OF BOTH SWODERY *AND* CHUCKERY WHAT ELSE IS THERE?

NOTHIN'!

A NEW OUTFIT WOULD BE COOL THOUGH. I HOPE IT HAS BITCHIN' SHOULDER PADS AND, LIKE, I DUNNO *SPIKES!*

they are spikes!

WELL, I GUESS THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT IT'LL MAKE MY FRIENDS HAPPY

STILL, *I'M* BORED AND THEIR TALKY-TALKING ISN'T GONNA HELP THAT AT ALL

AHH, THAT'S MUCH BETTER

MY SWORDIN' ARMS NEED A WORK-OUT

OKAY THIS IS KINDA SCARY

KRAKOW!

WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?

LIGHTNING?

IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE RAIN.

GUYS, GUYS, CHECK ME OUT!

WOOO! WAY TO GO, FIGHTER.

LOVE THE NEW LOOK

NO SPIKES THOUGH. MAYBE I COULD TAPE SOME ON.

YOU CAN'T TAPE SPIKES!

I'M NOT SAYING THEY'D BE FUNCTIONAL. I JUST LIKE HOW THEY LOOK

FIGHTER'S SO DUMB, IF HE WAS TWICE AS SMART AS HE'D NEED TO BE TO CHANGE CLASS, HE'D STILL BE SHORT OF THE MARK.

OH, SPARE ME.

MORON PROBABLY *FELL* INTO SOMEONE'S ARMOR.

NO WAY, DIG *THIS* ACTION.

THAT'S, UH THAT'S *GREAT*, FIGHTER.

THAT'S REALLY, REALLY GREAT

I MEAN, LOOK HE THINKS PEEK-A-BOO IS A SUPERPOWER

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THIS IS SO COOL AND I HAVEN'T EVEN STARTED!

SHHH, THE ADULTS ARE TALKING, SWEETIE

THIEF, YOU'RE A JERK.

TOSS SOME SAND INTO BLACK MAGE'S FACE FOR ME.

WITH GUSTO!

BUT... I LIKE MY FACE

I BLOCKED IT.

SEE? NOT A SINGLE SPECK GOT TO YOU.

OKAY, SOMEBODY THROW SOMETHING AT SOMEBODY, I WANNA TRY IT

SON OF A--!

HITTING YOU WITH A ROCK KNOCKS YOU OVER, BUT A HADOKEN JUST MAKES YOU MORE POWERFUL?

ARE YOU KIDDING?

YOU MISSED BY A [illegible].

I GUESS THE PERSPECTIVE WAS KINDA OFF THERE..

HM?

OH, I STOLE IT. FROM THE FUTURE.

WHATEVER SHUT UP

CRASS REFUSAL DOES NOT A REBUTTAL MAKE

HUH. THIS IS PRETTY COOL.

WAH?! WHEN DID YOU GET TO CHANGE CLASS?

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YOU KNOW WHAT? YOU GUYS ALL SUCK

YOU SUCK.

YOU SUCK.

AND YOU WERE WEARING RED A SECOND AGO!

NO I WASN'T. BESIDES, WHAT KIND OF NINJA WEARS BRIGHT [redacted]

HA! I NEVER SAID IT WAS BRIGHT RED

NEITHER DID I.

GHK!

IS YOUR NEW ABILITY TO GIVE BLACK MAGES ANEURYSMS?

EXPLODING BLOOD VESSELS WITH A SENTENCE IS BUT A PART OF THE NINJA'S DEADLY ARSENAL.

WE'RE GETTING OFF TRACK.

THE REAL ISSUE HERE IS THAT EVERYONE WHO CHANGED CLASS ROCKS.

YEAH!

WE'RE GREAT!

WOOOO!

CLASS CHANGE IS MY NEW BEST FRIEND!

SO AWESOME!

HOORAY TO US!

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YOU SHOULDN'T FEEL TOO BAD, BLACK MAGE.

IT'S JUST A CLASS CHANGE.

IT WILL HAPPEN NATURALLY WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT Y'KNOW, LIKE PUBERTY.

WHAT HAVE YOU TOLD THEM!

I KNOW IT WOULD ONLY HURT YOUR FEELINGS IF I TOLD THEM YOU DIDN'T START PUBERTY UNTIL LAST YEAR.

"WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME?"

WHAT? NOTHING.

ARE YOU *SURE*?

OF *COURSE*! I'M NOT AN IDIOT

OKAY THEN.

OH, RIGHT SORRY.

DON'T TELL EACH OTHER THAT, OKAY? IT'S A SECRET

BLACK MAGE WOULD BE REALLY EMBARRASSED IF YOU FOUND OUT ABOUT IT

ALL TAKEN CARE OF

DUNGEON!

THANK YOU, FIGHTER

I'M A HELPER!

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YOU KNOW WHAT, DARK GODS? I WORSHIPPED YOU.

I MADE SACRIFICES IN YOUR NAMES. EVEN YOU GUYS, WAY IN THE BACK, WHO HAVE NO NAMES.

AND, SURE, IT WAS ALL A RUSE TO SUCCOR MORE POWER FROM ALL OF YOU TO USURP EACH ONE IN SUCCESSION WHILE PLAYING THE SURVIVORS AGAINST EACH OTHER.

BUT, Y'KNOW, I JUST GET WRAPPED UP IN THE SPIRIT OF EVIL.

AND, COME ON. I TOOK OVER HELL!

GRANTED, IT WAS FOR LIKE TEN, TWENTY MINUTES, BUT THAT'S BETTER THAN MOST.

AND THIS IS HOW YOU REPAY MY LOYALTY? WITH NOTHING AT ALL?

WELL, WE ARE EVIL.

THIS IS NOT A GOOD PLAN.

THIS IS THE BEST PLAN. I UNCOVERED AN ANCIENT, FORGOTTEN TEXT THAT DESCRIBED A PATH TO INCREDIBLE POWER.

GARLAND, IT WAS LISTED IN THE CARD CATALOGUE. YOUR BOOK IS FULL OF LIES.

NO, DON'T YOU SEE? WHILE THOSE BLASTED LIGHT WARRIORS ARE BUNGLING THROUGH THE WORLD, WE WILL HAVE CHANGED OUR CLASSES!

BUT I DON'T BE WEARING GLASSES. YAR.

OR BE THAT THE POINT?

LIKE YE GLASSES BE A DISGUISE?

SO'S WE CAN WALK UP TO THEM LIGHTED WARRIORS AND HIT THEM.

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I THOUGHT YOU'D SOUND MORE, Y'KNOW, EVIL.

MY TRUE VOICE WOULD MAKE YOUR BRAIN **EAT** ITSELF

YOU ARE **SO COOL**

YES, I KNOW

ARE WE GOING TO SMITE MY ENEMIES NOW? OR HOW ABOUT MY FRIENDS?

THERE'S SOME INTERSECTION BETWEEN THE TWO, SO THAT SHOULD SIMPLIFY THINGS.

Black magic's Kill list

1. Everyone I know
2. Everyone I don't know

I AM HERE TO OFFER THAT WHICH YOU SEEK.

IF THIS INVOLVES SMITING, WE CAN TOTALLY DO THAT

THERE ARE FORCES AT WORK

THEY SEEK TO HINDER YOU, MANIPULATE YOU.

BUT LET THEM TRY WHEN THE SIGILS ARE UNDONE AND THE NEXUS IS FREE

YEAH, WHATEVER THAT MEANS, I'M A... FOR IT

I TRUST YOU KNOW ABOUT BLUE MAGIC.

I'VE HEARD THE **LEGENDS**, SURE.

IT IS TIME TO BECOME LEGENDARY

IT IS DONE!

OUR POWERS HAVE BEEN INCREASED INFINITELY, OR MORE!

WHAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND IS HOW YOU CONVINCED ME TO GO THIS FAR WITH IT.

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IT IS DONE.

AWESOME!

LET SWORDOPOLIS AND HIS FOOL TRY TO STOP YOU NOW.

WHO?

LET'S ASSUME THAT I MAKE UP WORDS SOMETIMES.

WAIT WHY DON'T I LOOK REALLY COOL?

"COOL"?

Y'KNOW, LIKE MY BUDDIES. THEY GOT AMAZING POWERS THAT I HATE AND SLICK OUTFITS TOO

I HAVE UNBOUND THE NEXUS.

I HAVE RELEASED, TO *YOU ALONE*, POWER WITHOUT LIMIT

AND YOU SPEAK TO ME OF FASHION.

YEAH. YOU KNOW, LIKE SPIKES OR SOMETHING NEAT.

I LIKED BLACK ROBES, BUT THEY WERE KILLED BY THAT PLAY, *THE MAGICS*.

I SAY, NEOSORN! WE ARE WEARING BLACK!

AYE, GOODFELLOW MOBIUSOCLES! *AYE!*

HOW ABOUT DARK, KINDA STORMY GRAY ROBES. AND...

ENOUGH PRATTLING.

GREAT!

HOW BITCHIN' IS IT? NO TIME TO TILT MY HEAD AND SEE FOR MYSELF— I'VE GOT GLOATIN' TO DO!

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LOOK ON MY CLOTHES, YE STUPIDS, AND DESPAIR

ARE YOU DESPAIRING SILENTLY?

ARE YOU LOOKING?

SO, WHAT, YOUR NEW CLASS IS CLOWN?

HAR, HAR ASS. I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW A DARK GOD UNLOCKED SOME--

WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?

ARE YOU SURE IT WAS A CLOWN GOD?

COULD HAVE BEEN A CLOWN GOD.

HE HAD LONG HAIR AND A CAPE.

HE WAS A BITCHIN' GOD OF DARKNESS, ALL RIGHT!

WHAT WAS HIS NAME THEN?

UH, HIS NAME? IT WAS UM, ER.

DARKO.

THE DARK GOD OF THE, UH. DARK.

YEAH,

THAT'S PLAUSIBLE.

SO WHAT'S YOUR NEW ABILITY? CAN WE SQUEEZE TEN OF YOU INTO A CART?

IN THE DARK?

CRETIN!

I'VE GOT BLUE MAGIC!

YOU SAID THAT WAS ONLY A LEGEND

LET'S SEE.

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RED MAGE, CAST ONE OF YOUR LAME ICE SPELLS AT ME.

ARE YOU SURE THAT'S WISE?

I CAN TELL YOU WHAT *ISN'T* WISE. GIVIN' ME BACK TALK. THAT'S--

THIS IS BLUE MAGIC?

HE'S *TURNING* A LITTLE BLUE.

MAYBE WE SHOULD GET H.M OUT OF THERE BEFORE HE FREEZES TO DEATH.

OH, HE'LL *SUFFOCATE* BEFORE THAT HAPPENS.

GOOD POINT

SO. WHAT'S FOR LUNCH?

IT WAS *THEN* THAT I KNEW WHAT HAD TO BE DONE.

FIGHTER?

THERE WAS ONLY ONE WAY TO GET BLACK MAGE OUT

AND IT WAS *TWO* WAYS.

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SO.

YOU'RE GOING TO SLICE BLACK MAGE OUT OF THERE WITH SURGEON-LIKE PRECISION. RIGHT?

RIGHT

ASSUMING SURGEONS ARE THOSE GUYS WHO HACK AT TREES WITH CHAINSAWS.

N

I'LL TAKE THAT AS A YES!

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OKAY, WE'VE GOT TO PUT THE HAND ON ICE.

ICE IS WHAT GOT US *INTO* THIS MESS!

YOU CAN'T SOLVE ALL YOUR PROBLEMS WITH ICE! UNLESS YOU WORK AT A SMOOTHIE BAR, OR MAYBE IF YOU'RE AN ESKIMO.

ESKIMO, EH?

LOOK, WE JUST NEED SOME WHITE MAGIC TO HEAL HIM UP

I'VE GOT GLUE. IT *IS* WHITE AND *WORKS* LIKE MAGIC.

OKAY, OKAY, THAT'S A START.

RED MAGE, YOU'RE *RED MAGE*! YOU CAN CAST WHITE MAGIC!

I GUESS.

I'D DERIVE MORE JOY FROM WATCHING SOMEONE SURGICALLY RE-ATTACH A HAND SO I COULD MIMIC IT ON BLACK MAGE.

THIEF, CAN I BORROW YOUR HANDS? JUST UNTIL WE FIND A DOCTOR.

NO.

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THINK HE'S DEAD?

WHO CARES? WE'VE ALL BEEN DEAD BEFORE

ALL I GOT OUT OF IT WAS A WEIRD CONVERSATION WITH A TOTEM SPIRIT.

YEAH, THE HEAVENLY INCARNATION OF SWORDS TALKS TO ME WHEN I'M NEAR DEATH.

OR BORED

AND NOW BLACK MAGE CLAIMS TO HAVE THIS "DARKO OF THE DARK GUY"

SOUNDS MADE UP TO ME

WISH I HAD A PATRON DEITY.

BUT RED MAGE, WHAT ABOUT ME?

OH, MEGAHEDRON, WE BOTH KNOW YOU'RE NOTHING MORE THAN THE RESULT OF MY THREE POINT HALLUCINATION FLAW, AND THEREFORE NOT REAL.

AM I DEAD?

UNLIKELY

WHAT HAPPENED TO ME BACK THERE?

IT LOOKS LIKE YOU WERE STUPIDLY FROZEN IN A BLOCK OF ICE. THEN THERE WERE COMPLICATIONS.

YEAH, WHAT WAS UP WITH THAT? I'VE GOT BLUE MAGIC NOW, YOU SAID SO!

YES, YES I DID.

I'M NOT SURE WHEN I SUGGESTED THAT YOU SHOULD GET FROZEN IN A BLOCK OF ICE THOUGH.

I DON'T REMEMBER SAYING *ANYTHING* LIKE THAT

PROBABLY BECAUSE IT'S SO STUPID

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AREN'T I CRAZY INVINCIBLE TO SPELLS NOW? I CAN, LIKE, EAT MAGIC OR SOMETHING.

THAT'S STUPID YOU ARE IMMUNE TO NOTHING.

I MEAN A STIFF *BREEZE* COULD--

HOW ABOUT YOU EXPLAIN THIS AGAIN?

AND BY AGAIN I MEAN FINALLY

THE SO-CALLED "MONSTERS" OF YOUR WORLD ARE FRAGMENTS OF CHAOS.

YOUR NEW GIFT GRANTS YOU ACCESS TO THEIR ABILITIES.

THESE ARE STRANGE POWERS UNKNOWABLE TO ANY OTHER MAGE.

THAT SOUNDS COOL. BUT WHAT'S THE POINT?

WHAT DEFENSE CAN BE MOUNTED AGAINST A FOE POSSESSED OF A THOUSAND UNKNOWN ATTACKS?

OKAY, I'M LIKING IT.

BUT WHY DID THE ICE SPELL FREEZE ME LIKE THAT?

THE ONLY WAY TO CLAIM ANOTHER'S MAGIC AS YOUR OWN IS TO FIRST SURVIVE IT.

SO IF I FIND A DRAGON.

ENRAGE H.M.

AND MANAGE TO SURVIVE BEING SET AFLAME SOMEHOW...

...I COULD THEN BREATHE FIRE TOO?

PRECISELY

UH-HUH

IT'D BE LESS TROUBLE TO SET MYSELF ON FIRE AND HUG MY ENEMIES. TO ME, I DON'T KNOW, THAT SEEMS LIKE A SIGN.

A BIG ONE THAT SAYS, "*I HATE BLUE MAGIC.*"

ONE MORE QUESTION. WHERE DO YOU FIT IN IF CHAOS IS THE BIG HONCHO OF EVIL?

I'M AN EXCUTIVE ASSISSTANT TO CHAOS.

EVIL HAS MIDDLE MANAGE-MENT?

FILF YOU KIDDING? THAT'S ALL WE ARE.

NOW YOUR TIME HERE IS AT AN END

I THINK HE'S GAINING UP

STAND BACK GIVE HIM SOME AIR

AM I DEAD?

UNLIKELY

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

NOW KEEP IN MIND THAT MAGIC IS NOT AN EXACT SCIENCE

MAGIC DOESN'T INVOLVE SEWING MY ARMS ON!

TURNS OUT SURGERY ISN'T AN EXACT SCIENCE EITHER.

AND TECHNICALLY YOUR ARMS ARE *CROCHETED* ON.

SEWING IS DIFFERENT

FIX IT!

FIX IT!

FIX IT!

NOW THAT *LOOKS* RIGHT..

FIX IT!

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ARE WE QUITE DONE WITH BUFFOONERY?

IN AN IMMEDIATE OR OVERALL SENSE?

IMMEDIATE.

I HAVE NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT THE LATTER.

ALLUSIONS, BLACK MAGE. *ALLUSIONS.*

YES, OF COURSE. HOW STUPID OF ME.

OKAY WE HAVE ALL-NEW, ALL-TERRIBLE POWERS. IT'S TIME TO TEST THEM PROPERLY.

AGAINST THE RICH AND ELDERLY!

AGAINST A FARMABLE FOE!

AGAINST EVIL, BUT ALWAYS IN A RESPONSIBLE MANNER TOWARD THE BETTERMENT OF SOCIETY.

PERHAPS ACCORDING TO A VOTE OR, FAILING THAT, DECREE OF A DEMOCRATICALLY APPOINTED COMMITTEE.

IS THAT WHAT YOU THINK WE DO?

I MEAN SURE, WE TAKE SOME FAIRLY INDISCRIMINATE LIBERTIES,

BUT YEAH, BASICALLY.

OUR AUTHORITY TO ACT FOR THE WORLD ***HAS*** TO COME FROM THE PEOPLE, OR THEIR REPRESENTATIVES, BM.

OTHERWISE WE'RE JUST ANOTHER GANG OF MURDEROUS THUGS.

OKAY.

WHAT IF ***WE*** HAPPENED TO BE THOSE VERY REPRESENTATIVES?

WELL, OBVIOUSLY OUR ACTIONS WOULD JUSTIFY THEMSELVES, IPSO FACTO.

QED, QUID QUO PRO, AND E PLURIBUS UNUM.

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ANYTHING THAT UGLY WANTS TO DIE.

AWW.

I THINK HE'S CUTE

YOU SAID THAT ABOUT EVERY MONSTER SO FAR!

BUT LOOKIT 'IM.

HE'S SO **FAT** KINDA LIKE YOU, BLACK MAGE.

AND THAT WEASEL-LIKE EXPRESSION.

YOU ***KNOW*** HE'S NEEDLESSLY ANTAGONISTIC TO THE OTHER FAT LITTLE MONSTERS TO COMPENSATE FOR HIS POOR SELF-IMAGE.

LIKE YOU, BLACK MAGE!

I WAS WRONG. ANYTHING THAT UGLY WANTS YOU TO DIE.

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HE MIGHT BE KINDA TOUGH.

HE'S GOT HORNS.

DON'T BE STUPID. THOSE ARE VESTIGIAL AT BEST WHY ARE YOU SO STUPID?

WELL, I HARDLY THINK—

NO ONE CARES.

NOW, WHAT IS OUR PLAN OF ACTION?

I'VE GOT SWORDS. SWORDS ARE USED IN COMBAT, Y'KNOW!

THAT'S GOOD, WHAT ELSE?

I'LL MIMIC IT, DOUBLING THE SWORDED MAYHEM.

WOW SURPRISINGLY NON-IDIOTIC. THIEF?

HM? OH, I'LL THROW SOMETHING AT IT

THROW? LIKE, WHAT, A ROCK?

WHATEVER'S AROUND, YEAH. I CAN THROW ANYTHING.

THAT'S YOUR BIG POWER?

SUDDENLY I'M NOT SO JEALOUS

OH, SURE, I DON'T HAVE TO GET KICKED IN THE JUNK TO ACTIVATE IT, BUT I LIKE IT ANYWAY.

I JUST DON'T SEE WHAT USE—

OH. THERE ARE USES.

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ARGH, MY BONES!

WOW! DOES THAT ATTACK DO A LOT OF DAMAGE?

A LOT OF DAMAGE IS *DONE*

FIGHTER YOU KNOW WHAT I MUST DO.

I UNDERSTAND, AND I APPROVE.

A LITTLE *CLOSE!*

DON'T WORRY, I'LL FIX IT

OH YE GODS, NO. I BEG YOU, JUST WALK AWAY BEFORE YOU...

..DO SOMETHING INCREDIBLY STUPID

BLACK MAGE, I THINK I JUST DID SOME-THING INCREDIBLY SMART

THAT'S THE TROUBLE WITH YOU, REALLY

I HAVE INVENTED SOME-THING.

PLEASE, NO.

OH YES!

IT'S A LITTLE SOMETHING I LIKE TO CALL *MAGE SWORD*

MAGE BLADE

IT SOUNDS COOLER

THANKS, RM!

NOT *HELPING!*

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OKAY, LET'S DO THIS.

YOU'RE GOING TO KILL ME

DON'T BE CRAZY. I'D *NEVER* INTENTIONALLY HURT YOU, PAL.

IS THERE NO *IRONY* CENTER IN YOUR BRAIN?

AS MANY TIMES AS YOU'VE STABBED ME IN THE HEAD, I'M SURE IT'S THERE SOME-WHERE.

OKAY, I WALKED INTO THAT ONE.

C'MON. WE HAVE TO DO IT.

NO, I DON'T THINK WE DO.

BUT "NINJA BLADE" IS THE ONLY THING THAT SOUNDS COOLER THAN "*MAGE* BLADE". WE CAN STICK IT IN YOUR HAIR

I WANT YOU TO MIMIC WHAT I'M ABOUT TO DO.

Y'AIN'T GOTTA ASK TWICE!

COOKIE BOUNCER

NO.

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MOVE MAGE BLADE TO ATTACK FORMATION.

MAGE BLADE READY

SON OF A--!

OOF!

I DID WHAT NOW?

GOOD IDEA, BLACK MAGE!

BEHOLD THE *AWESOME* POWER OF THE *AWESOME* MAGE KNIGHT!

MAGE KNIGHT?

I HAVEN'T A MOMENT TO SPARE!

IF YOU *THINK* THIS INVOLVES A "NINJA-MAGE", I'VE GOT A KICK YOU CAN MIME.

NO, THIEF

THIS IS EVEN *BIGGER* THAN A NINJA-MAGE.

SO I'M GOING TO SHOOT LIGHTNING AT THE MONSTER WHILE YOU SWORD AT IT, RIGHT?

NO, *EVEN* BETTER.

WITH YOU UP THERE WE'VE *DOUBLED* OUR REACH FOR HEADBUTTS. LET'S GO!

OKAY WE'RE DONE HERE.

FIGHTER, I FINISHED YOUR..

AH, I SEE NEVERMIND

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OKAY THIS ENDS NOW.

C'MERE, MONSTER

THAT'S WHAT THEY ALL SAY.

THUDOM!

OH, THE DREADED GOBLIN PUNCH!

YOU CALL IT A GOBLIN PUNCH.

EVEN THOUGH IT WAS VERY CLEARLY A KICK

AND THERE ISN'T A GOBLIN WITHIN A THOUSAND MILE RADIUS.

WHAT? THAT'S THE NAME OF THE TECHNIQUE AS CHRONICLED BY THE GREATEST CRYPTO-ZOOLOGIST IN ALL RED WIZARD HISTORY

BLINDY O'SIGHTLESS.

THE MORE I LEARN ABOUT YOU, THE MORE IT MAKES SENSE.

THAT'S GOOD RIGHT?

IF YOU LIKE.

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LOOKS LIKE THAT STAB TO THE HEAD WASN'T SO BAD AFTER-ALL.

YOU GET USED TO IT AFTER THE FIRST DOZEN TIMES.

DOZEN TIMES.

DOZEN TIMES.

DOZEN TIMES

INNA NERTS!

SO HOW DO WE GET OFF THIS ISLAND?

DOZEN TIMES.

BUT I REMEMBER A LOT OF THINGS THAT WAY

THE WAY I REMEMBER IT, THE AIRSHIP WAS DESTROYED BY THE THE GODS WHEN AN INSTRUMENT OF THEIR WI... MADE RED MAGE SHUT UP

THE ONE BLACK MAGE DESTROYED?

WE'LL JUST TAKE THE AIR SHIP!

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I KNOW HOW WE CAN GET OFF THE ISLAND

IF THIS IS ANOTHER ONE OF YOUR INANE NON-PLANS, I SWEAR TO EVERY THIRD EVIL GOD..

NO, NO, NO. THAT WAS THE OLD RED MAGE.

I'VE GROWN.

GOOD

NOW, THE WAY I SEE IT, WE NEED AN AIRSHIP

SO, I'LL FAKE KNOWING THE AIRSHIP ENGINEERING SKILL

THEN I'LL MIMIC MY USE OF THAT SKILL DOUBLING OUR PROGRESS.

OKAY, THIS IS SURE TO WORK. IT USES PHYSICS.

I HAVE A BOX INTO WHICH I MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE PUT A SPARKPLUG FROM THE AIRSHIP WRECKAGE.

QUANTUM MECHANICALLY, THERE'S A CHANCE WHEN I OPEN THE BOX THAT THERE WILL BE AN AIRSHIP INSIDE OF IT

"MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE PUT A SPARK-PLUG"?

WELL, I HAD MY EYES CLOSED WHEN I DID IT

SO I WOULDN'T KNOW

RED MAGE..

OKAY HEAR ME OUT

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WHERE'S RED MAGE?

HE'S DILIGENTLY WORKING TO GET US OFF THIS ISLAND

I ASSUME YOU AUTHORIZED THAT

NO, FIGHTER DID.

DOZEN TIMES.

OF COURSE I DID

YOU KNOW HE'S RED MAGE, RIGHT?

WE'LL BE LUCKY IF HE DOESN'T DESTROY THE ISLAND AND CLAIM SUCCESS BECAUSE WE'RE NO LONGER ON IT.

ORDINARILY, YEAH.

BUT THIS HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH RIDING UGLY, OVERSIZED BIRDS.

BIRDS THAT CAN'T FLY

OR SWIM.

OR SUPPORT OUR WEIGHT

AND SMELL LIKE AN INTESTINAL CATASTROPHE LEFT IN THE SUN FOR THREE DAYS

THIS WAS THE GOOD PLAN.

OKAY I'M GOING TO SEE IF HE NEEDS A PATENTED "NINJA SURPRISE"

THAT'LL HELP?

IT'S LIKE HELP

AUGH!

THAT'S NOT HELP AT ALL!

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YET AGAIN, MY GEN.US, WHICH IS BEYOND BOTH REPROACH ***AND*** APPROACH, HAS SAVED US.

YES, YES. YOU'RE VERY CLEVER.

NOW TO DISCLOSE TO YOU THE PROCESS THAT LED ME TO THE ULTIMATE SOLUTION SO THAT YOU MAY APPRECIATE MY BRI..LIANCE ALL THE MORE.

OH, I COULDN'T POSS.B..Y APPRECIATE YOU MORE THAN I AL.READY DO.

I ***ASSURE*** YOU.

I BEGAN WITH THE MOST OBVIOUS COURSE NATURA..Y

BU..D A RAFT OUT OF CHOCOBO.

THAT... THAT DIDN'T QUITE WORK OUT

TWAS MERE..Y A MINOR SET BACK FOR MY GEN.OUS.

DID YOU ***SAY*** "GEN***IOUS***"?

SO I MOVED TO THE NEXT LOGICAL PLAN, AND BUILT AN AIR-SHIP OUT OF THEM!

IN RETROSPECT, TYING THEM TOGETHER BY THEIR WINGS FOR MAXIMUM LIFT MAY NOT HAVE BEEN THE BEST IDEA.

THERE WERE... COMPLICATIONS

BUT IT'S ***THESE*** SETBACKS THAT LEAD TO OUR GREATEST VICTORIES.

AND ***THAT*** WOULD BE?

CHOCOBO SEX!

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NOT SEX *WITH* THE CHOCOBOS! JEEZ.

OH.

AS I WAS SAYING, MORE TRADITIONAL METHODS FAILED ME. THE CHOCOBO GENOME WAS LACK-ING.

THE EXPLANATION FOR THE CONTINUED FAILURES OF YOUR AGGRESSIVELY INANE PLANS MUST LIE ELSEWHERE

'CAUSE LORD KNOWS IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN YOUR IDIOTIC IDEAS.

EXACTLY THUS, I SOUGHT TO IMPROVE THE CHOCOBO THROUGH SELECTIVE BREEDING.

NOT *WITH* THEM!

OH.

BUT I DID WATCH THEM MATE FOR A FEW HOURS.

WHY DID YOU HAVE TO WATCH?

OH, I NEVER SAID I *HAD* TO.

IT'S REALLY MY FAULT BECAUSE I CONTINUE LISTENING TO THE THINGS THAT YOU SAY

RELYING ON EVOLUTION WOULD TAKE TOO LONG, OF COURSE. SO I HAD TO TAKE THE MATTER OF THEIR BREEDING INTO MY OWN HANDS.

NOT THEIR *GENITALS*

OH.

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BEHOLD THE FRUITS OF *GENIUS!*

I'LL BEHOLD ANY-THING AS LONG AS YOUR PANTS STAY ON

THEN TURN AROUND AND PREPARE YOUR MIND TO BE BLOWN LIKE YOU'VE NEVER BEEN BLOWN BEFORE.

WHAT IS IT?!

WE WENT OVER THIS.

FRUITS OF GENIUS.

ALL IT REQUIRED WAS A COCKTAIL OF DANGEROUS, EXPERIMENTAL SURGERY AND A WILLINGNESS TO IGNORE THE UNNECESSARY SUFFERING OF PERFECTLY INNOCENT BEINGS!

ALSO, I SHOT MAGIC INTO THEIR CHROMOSOMES UNTIL THEY TURNED INSIDE-OUT. EVOLUTION IS MY *BITCH.*

BE THAT AS IT MAY, IT *MAKES NO SENSE*

I LIKE ME

I THINK HE LIKES WHAT I'VE DONE

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WHY IS THERE A PILE OF MEAT AND FEATHERS IN THE ROUGH SHAPE OF A HIDEOUS MUTATED CHOCOBO OVER THERE?

THAT WOULD BE MY HANDIWORK, THANKS.

I SEE. ANOTHER QUESTION THEN.

SHOOT

YES-INQUIRY!

GOOD QUESTION.

THAT ABERRATION CAN'T POSSIBLY GET US OFF THE ISLAND WHAT WAS THE POINT?

YOU CAN RIDE IT!

AWW *MAN*. I NEVER GET TO RIDE CRIMES AGAINST NATURE, OR HOBOS, OR NUTHIN'.

FIGHTER, GET DOWN FROM THERE, YOU KNOW BETTER THAN TO RIDE CRIMES AGAINST NATURE.

OBVIOUSLY, *THIS* CHOCOBO WON'T GET US OFF THE ISLAND HE CAN HARDLY BREATHE, REALLY

BUT I HAD TO DO SOMETHING WITH ALL THE INFERIOR GENES TO MAKE WAY FOR THE ULTIMATE, *PERFECT* CREATURE.

MUH THAT'S HOW ELF MYTHOLOGY EXPLAINS THE EXISTENCE OF ALL THE OTHER RACES.

SOME OF THE GODS, TOO.

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NO, THIS PERVERSION OF SCIENCE AND MAGIC IS WORTHLESS TO US.

BUT IT WAS NECESSARY TO GIVE FORM TO THIS MAGNIFICENT BEAST

BEHOLD AGAIN!

THE (UNTIL RECENTLY) MYTHICAL GOLDEN CHOCOBO OF LORE!

A SOLID GOLD BIRD, EH?

NO, THAT REFERS ONLY TO ITS COLOR

YOU ARE SO USELESS TO ME

WHAT'S SO FANCY ABOUT A GOLDEN CHOCOBO, ANYWAY?

SHE CAN GO ANY-WHERE!

ANYWHERE?

ANYWHERE!

I BET IT CAN'T GO TO THE MOON.

WELL, HECK I WAS WRONG.

OKAY.

PLAN B. DO WE HAVE ONE?

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LUCKILY, I HAD THIS SPARE GOLDEN CHOCOBO ALL ALONG.

WHAT? ARE YOU UGLY, STUPID, ***AND*** COLOR-BLIND? THAT BIRD AIN'T GOLDEN.

SHHH! DO YOU WANT TO RUIN EVERYTHING? HE DOESN'T KNOW THAT!

WHAT DO YOU ***MEAN***, "HE DOESN'T KNOW THAT"?

LET'S JUST SAY THERE'S NO PART OF THE NATURE VS. NURTURE DEBATE THAT CAN'T BE SOLVED VIA HIGHLY INVASIVE BRAIN SURGERY

WHAT IS ***WITH*** YOU AND SURGERY LATELY?

I MIMED CROCHET FROM FIGHTER.

THAT'S EXPLANATION ENOUGH.

THAT WAS ***HOURS*** AGO.

YOUR MIME CRAP WEARS OFF AFTER THREE SECONDS.

HMM...

EARLIER.

OKAY.

THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM.

AND HERE I THOUGHT I JUST HADN'T FAKED MY ANATOMY SKILL ENOUGH.

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Ah. THIS SUN AND FRESH AIR. IT'S GREAT

DAYS LIKE TODAY REMIND ME WHY I LOVE BEING A LIGHT WARRIOR SO MUCH.

IT'S LIKE THROAT CANCER, BUT WITHOUT THE SYMPATHY FROM STRANGERS.

I'D PREFER SOME DANK SECLUSION...

BUT IT *IS* KINDA NICE BEING ALLOWED TO PUSH PEOPLE AROUND

YOU PUSH PEOPLE?

WOULDN'T THAT BREAK YOUR SPINDLY WIZARD'S WRISTS?

REALLY?

YOU KNOW, HITTING THE WATER AT THIS SPEED WOULD SNAP YOUR NECK LIKE A TWIG.

C'MERE. I'LL *SHOW* YOU.

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OH, IT'S GOOD TO SEE *CIVILIZATION* AGAIN.

CIVILIZATION?

NO. THIS IS A COLLECTION OF SHANTIES BUILT BY MONKEYS.

ESTABLISH A STABLE, UNIFIED SOCIETY WITH TEN THOUSAND YEARS OF BEAUTIFUL CULTURE. AND *THEN* WE'LL TALK.

Y'KNOW, I'VE ALWAYS MEANT TO ASK YOU SOMETHING.

IF YOU ELVES ARE SO GREAT, WHY IS YOUR TECHNOLOGY ON PAR WITH HUMANS EVEN THOUGH YOU HAD A NINE THOUSAND YEAR HEAD START?

IT'S.

THAT'S HOW WE LIKE IT.

AND HOW UNIFIED CAN ELF SOCIETY BE WHEN THERE WAS THAT OUTCAST CLAN?

THEY WERE FIGHTING A SHADOW WAR TO DISSOLVE YOUR KINGDOM.

ONE OF THEM POISONED YOUR DAD

IN FACT, WASN'T THE THRONE NEARLY USURPED BY THEM HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR OUR EXTREMELY *NON-ELFY* INTERVENTION?

NO MORE QUESTIONS.

THE ANSWERS WOULD ONLY FURTHER CONFUSE YOUR SIMPLE MINDS.

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FRONTIER TOWN WELCOMES OH YE WARRIORS OF LIGHT.

THAT'S GRAND

IT'LL COST YOU 1,000 GIL TO STABLE THOSE CHOCOBO.

ONE-THOUSAND GIL?

EACH.

FIGHTER, GO TO THE EDGE OF TOWN AND COUNT TO A TRILLION.

YAY, COUNTING GAME!

BLOG OF VIOLENCE

WAIT

DID WE EVEN WANT TO STABLE THEM?

SO, WHAT'S YOUR POINT?

NINE HUNDRED NINETY-NINE MILLION AND SIX.

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HEY, IS YOUR CHOCOBO OKAY?

I GOT HIM LOWERED.

LOWERED

YEAH, THE STOCK SPRINGS ARE NEVER STIFF ENOUGH, Y'KNOW

I ALSO INSTALLED A NEW INTAKE, HEADERS, ROLL BARS, MANIFOLD, CLUTCH WHEEL, AND A NEW EXHAUST

OH, AND LAMBO DOORS.

WHAT?

AND HE'S A CONVERTIBLE NOW, AS YOU CAN SEE.

OKAY RED MAGE IS INVOLVED IN THIS, ISN'T HE?

OF COURSE

WHO DO YOU THINK DID THE HOVER CONVERSION?

KNOW THIS.

THERE IS A HELL, AND WHEN YOU ARE THERE, I SHALL VISIT UPON YOU SUCH DARK HORRORS AS THEIR NAMES CANNOT BE SPOKEN.

YOU NEED MORE STICKERS.

WE ARE SO FAR BEYOND STICKERS.

STICKERS INCREASE YOUR MAX SPEED

TELL ME MORE.

I HAVE INVENTED A NEW PHRASE:

"SLIPPERY SLOPE."

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WELL, YOU *SAID* YOU WANTED IT LOWERED THOSE KNEES WERE JUST TAKING UP SPACE.

IT WAS GOING TO BREAK DOWN EVENTUALLY. I HAD TO REPLACE THE OIL WITH BLOOD TO KEEP THE HEAD ALIVE

HEY, THE EXCESS OIL HAD TO GO *SOME-WHERE*

AND SINCE *THIS* ONE HAD RECENTLY HAD ALL ITS BLOOD REMOVED..

I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK THIS WOULDN'T BE SO BAD IF WE HAD AT LEAST ONE MORE CHOCOBO.

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WELCOME TO CIRCLE CAVE
HOME TO THE SAGACIOUS SARDA

WE HAVE RETURNED AT LAST

AND ALL IT TOOK WAS ONE QUICK TRIP THROUGH POISON FOREST

AND THEN POISON SWAMP, POISON TUNDRA, AND THE PLAINS OF POISON.

LET'S ALL THANK RED MAGE FOR HIS INCITEFUL SHORT-CUTS.

I THINK YOU MEANT "INSIGHTFUL," THIEF

I KNOW WHAT I MEANT

WELCOME TO CIRCLE CAVE
HOME TO THE SAGACIOUS SARDA

POOF!

AH, LIGHT WARRIORS! WELCOME!

WAIT ONE *DAMN* SECOND COULD YOU HAVE DONE THAT AT *ANY* TIME?

NO, NOT AT ANY TIME. DON'T BE SO STUPID

JUST ANY TIME I *FELT* LIKE IT.

SNAP!

YEARGHBLBLE!

I'D SAY HIS MORAL FRAME-WORK JUST SNAPPED, BUT WHAT MORAL FRAMEWORK?

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OH, GREAT AND WISE SARDA.

THOSE *ARE* THINGS I AM.

WE BRING UNTO THEE THE POWER OF, UH, OURSELVES.

LO, YOU HAVE COMPLETED ANOTHER MYSTERIOUS, NARRATIVELY VITAL TASK.

A DRAGON GAVE US SUPERPOWERS AND TAUGHT US ABOUT EARTHQUAKES.

THEY ARE CAUSED BY HIS *BATHING SUIT AREA.*

CAN I TALK TO ANYONE ELSE?

SORRY, SARDA.

GOOD

NOW FOR YOUR NEXT AND MOST CHAL..ENGING QUEST

YOU MUST RECOVER *THE ORB OF WATER!*

THAT DOESN'T SOUND TOO BAD

IT IS KEPT AT THE BOTTOM OF THE OCEAN.

THERE IT IS SURROUNDED BY A LEGION OF GURG-LING, FACELESS HORRORS FORGOTTEN BY THE LIGHT

OH.

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WELL, YOU BONED *YOURSELF* ON THIS ONE, MR SARDA.

HOW DO YOU EXPECT A TROUPE OF AIR-BREATHING MAMMALS TO TRAVEL UNDER THE SEA?

YEAH, LAND SUBS ARE USELESS UNDER WATER.

THEY SINK.

ARE YOU QUITE DONE?

WE COULD GO ON, BUT THE POINT HAS BEEN MADE CLEAR.

ALL CONTINGENCIES HAVE BEEN ACCOUNTED FOR, I ASSURE YOU.

I *AM* AN OMNIGENIUS, Y'KNOW

WOW, ME TOO!

THAT'S ADORABLE

JUST GO OUTSIDE, BEHOLD MY BOUNTY UNTO YE, AND MAKE WITH THE QUESTING.

YOU KNOW WHAT? SARDA C... *FU...*

...THEN ...UPID ...E

HEY, THIS LOOKS KINDA LIKE OUR *OLD* AIRSHIP AND THE DEATHTRAP FROM BEFORE THAT WEIRD!

UNTIL THE HANDLE BREAKS OFF AND I SHOVE IT ... HIS A...

WELL...

I'D GO... THE HARDCO... STUFF

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING, WE DON'T KNOW IT WON'T WORK AS WELL UNDERWATER AS THE OLD ONES WORKED IN THE AIR.

...MAKE HIM REGRE... BEING BORN A MAN.

ALSO, I WANT TO KI... IT WITH FIRE AND NEVER LOOK BACK.

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SARDA?

QUICK QUESTION.

WHAT THE CRAP IS THAT CRAP PILE OUT THERE? *CRAP?*

WHY, IT'S AN AIR-SUB.

DON'T TAKE THIS THE WRONG WAY, BUT THAT SOUNDS LIKE CRAP

ALMOST AS CRAP-LIKE AS RED MAGE HERE.

ARE YOU DONE BELLY-ACHIN'?

NO, ACTUALLY

I *WOULD* LIKE TO TAKE A MOMENT TO NOTE WHAT AN ODD CHOICE..

OH, WHAT HAVE I DONE?

THE AIR-SUB IS *JUST* LIKE YOUR OLD AIRSHIP, ONLY IT TRAVELS UNDER-WATER AS WE...

HRK!

THAT'S JUST WHAT WE NEED!

OF COURSE, *TAKING* IT UNDERWATER WOULD INSTANTLY KILL EVERYONE ON BOARD, BUT THAT'S NOT MY PROBLEM. I TRUST THERE ARE NO MORE QUESTIONS.

WHAT'S *CRAWLING OUT* OF BLACK MAGE'S MOUTH?

HE'S JUST VOMITING HIS ENTIRE DIGES-TIVE TRACT

WILL HE BE OKAY?

OH, YES, OF COURSE. HE'LL BE FINE

AS LONG AS HE DOESN'T TRY TO EAT OR BREATHE.

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HEY, CHUMPS.

BLACK MAGE, YOU'RE ALIVE!

AFTER YOU GUYS LEFT ME TO ROT...

NOT THAT I'M BITTER OR WILL MAKE HELL SEEM AS A REPRIEVE ONCE I'M FINISHED WITH YOU..

I TOLD SARDA WHAT'S WHAT

TSK. YOU'RE GETTING MY FLOORS ALL STICKY.

LOOK, IF I PUT YOUR ORGANS BACK, WI... YOU JUST GO AWAY?

MRF

LITTLE DOES SARDA KNOW HE SIGNED H.S OWN DEATH WARRANT

TIME TO GIVE THE JACKASS "WIZARD WHO DID IT" A TASTE OF HIS OWN JACKASS MEDICINE!

HEY, SARDA!

COME OUT HERE AND FACE THE AWESOME FURY OF BLUE MAGIC.

'KAY!

WOOF!

WELCOME TO CIRCLE CAVE
HOME TO THE SAGACIOUS SARDA

IRCLE CAVE
,AC IOUS SARDA

NOW GET OFF MY LAWN!

I'M NOT SURE WHICH IS WORSE PUKING OUT HIS GUTS TWICE OR THAT THEY ACTUALLY CAME OUT BACKWARDS THIS TIME.

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YOU KNOW WHAT I LEARNED TODAY?

WHEN SARDA CASTS A SPELL TO HURT YOU, AND YOU LEARN THAT SPELL, YOU LEARN *TO CAST A SPELL THAT HURTS YOU*

WELL, YEAH.

IS THIS NEWS?

OBVIOUSLY THAT'S HOW IT WOULD BE

SURE. I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO DIDN'T ALREADY KNOW THAT

WHY DO YOU THINK I NEVER CAST THOSE SPELLS?

YOU DON'T KNOW MAGIC!

AND THIS IS WHY

GHKT!

BUT THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE AT ALL.

I DON'T KNOW MAGIC EITHER.

THAT'S GREAT

I CAN CAST SPELLS, OF COURSE

I'M JUST NOT STUPID ENOUGH TO MAGIC A SUCKING CHEST WOUND INTO MYSELF.

WELL, YOU'RE *TALKING* YOURSELF INTO ONE.

LESS TALKING AND MORE *GOING AWAY*

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OKAY, LET'S GET THIS BIRD IN THE AIR.
AIRSUB, THIEF BIRDS ARE WINGED ANIMALS.
THANKS, FIGHTER.
BIRDS ALSO FLY, SO THAT PROBABLY CONFUSED YOU.
THANKS, FIGHTER.
YOU CAN REMEMBER IT WITH THIS SIMPLE RHYME.
NO I CAN'T, WE'RE TAKING OFF NOW.
TURBINES TO SPEED!
I'LL ASSUME THESE LIGHTS MEAN "YES."
CROSS CHECKING.
ON IT!
LIFT OFF!
SHROOOOOSH!
REPORTING FOR DUTY!
I SAID CHECKING.
CROSS CHECKING.
AH, YES. I SEE
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JUST CHECKED OUT THE STORAGE ROOM.

WE HAVE A PROBLEM.

THERE'S A STORAGE ROOM?

ACTUALLY, NO, THERE *ISN'T* BUT ACCORDING TO THE SHIP'S MANUAL, THAT'S WHERE OUR FOOD AND FUEL IS KEPT THAT'S THE PROBLEM.

SO WHAT'S KEEPING US AIR BORN?

I'M A PILOT!

CRASH

I HAVE DOUBTS ABOUT THE VIABILITY OF MANNED FLIGHT

IS IT THE CRASHING?

IT'S THE CRASHING, ISN'T IT?

IT FEATURES PROMINENTLY

WE'RE NOT GOING TO ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING BY BURNING TO DEATH IN HERE LET'S MOVE.

BUT THERE'S NO FIRE.

WOOSH

OH, *THAT* FIRE.

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OKAY, RED MAGE, GATHER THE SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT ON THIS LIST
I MUST WARN YOU, ITEMS I PROCURE WILL BE MIN/MAXED FOR GREATEST UTILITY PER VALUE PER MODIFICATION.
THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I'M COUNTING ON.
FIGHTER, GO WITH HIM. HE'LL NEED YOU TO CARRY EVERYTHING.
ROCK!
BLACK MAGE, YOUR JOB WILL BE TO GATHER INTEL FROM THE LOCALS.
WHY DO I GET STUCK ON RUBE DUTY? WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?
I WILL MOST CERTAINLY NOT BE COMMITTING AIRSUB INSURANCE FRAUD.
VERY GULLIBLE
INSURANCE CO.
We believe you
TSK THIS LIST NEEDS MORE PORTABLE HOLES.
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I MAY BE STUCK TALKING TO THE LOCALS, BUT NO ONE'S WATCHING TO MAKE SURE I DON'T DO IT REALLY HALF-ASSED

I'M JUST GONNA STAND HERE AND WAIT FOR THE OTHERS.

„EGEND SAYS THE SKY WARRIORS FLEW ABOUT, HERE AND THERE, FROM A CASTLE HIGH IN THE SKY

UH THAT'S ***STUPID*** AND YOU'RE STUPID FOR REPEATING IT

UNBELIEVABLE!

YOU ARE OUTSIDERS, RIGHT?

THEN HOW DID YOU EVER GET THIS FAR NORTH?

WE WENT ***NORTH.***

HAVE YOU BEEN TO LEFEIN? I JUST CANNOT UNDERSTAND A WORD SPOKEN THERE. I HAVE OFTEN WONDERED WHAT „ANGUAGE..

YOU WENT OUT OF YOUR WAY TO TALK TO ME JUST TO WALK AWAY IN THE MIDDLE OF A SENTENCE? WHAT KIND OF MORON TOWN IS THIS?

LET ME SEE. YES, THERE WAS A PROFESSOR WHO ***STUDIED*** LEFEINISH.

NO ONE'S TALKING TO YOU, MAN!

THE FAIRY AT THE SPRING WAS KIDNAPPED

THE "FAIRY"? WHAT ARE YOU ***ON***?

YOU ARE TOO LATE! I BOTTLED THE FAIRY AND SOLD HER TO A CARAVAN.

YOU'RE ***DELUSIONAL***, GO BOTHER SOMEONE ELSE!

FINALLY

I SAW A SHINING OBJECT FLYING TOWARDS THE EAST

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SUPPLIES, EQUIPMENT, AND TOOLS!

FROM THE SKY?

IT'S A MIRACLE!

THERE'S ENOUGH HERE TO REPAIR, MAYBE EVEN BUILD A MEANS OF TRANSPORT!

WE'RE SAVED!

NO, FIGHTER, I MEAN A PORTABLE HOLE CAN'T BE FOLDED AT ALL.

EVERYTHING WE KNOW ABOUT SPACE, TIME, AND MAGIC WOULD HAVE TO FALL APART FOR THAT TO OCCUR.

YOU'D HAVE ***BETTER*** LUCK TRYING TO BREATHE THROUGH YOUR ELBOWS.

EXPERIENCE MAGIC

THAT PROBABLY EXPLAINS THE LOUD POPPING NOISE.

AND THE SCREAMS.

WAIT, SOMETHING ELSE IS COMING OUT OF THE SKY

ARE YOU SURE? BECAUSE IT SOUNDS MORE LIKE A HOLE IN SPACE-TIME IS PUKING ITSELF OUT

DON'T BE SO NEGATIVE, THIS IS THE FIRST BREAK WE'VE--

POP!

LET'S FIND BLACK MAGE AND GET BACK TO THE AIRSUB

WHAT AIRSUB?

YOU BURNED IT DOWN.

THAT WAS JUST A RUSE SO I COULD CASH IN AN INSURANCE POLICY THAT DIDN'T EXIST FOR TWICE WHAT THE CRAFT WAS WORTH.

IT WAS AWFULLY HOT FOR ***JUST*** A RUSE.

WELL, THE PART ABOUT IT BEING A RUSE IS A LIE.

NOW C'MON.

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ARE THE LEGENDS TRUE? IS THERE REALLY A MA—

I HEARD THERE'S A MONSTER IN THE LAKE. WHAT KIND OF—

YOU CAN USE WHITE MAGIC TO HEAL INJURIES WHEN—

I CAN'T BELIEVE I KEEP GETTING AWAY WITH THIS.

MY SON HAS GONE GONE MISSING. AS HAVE FOUR OF MY NEIGHBORS AND THAT GUY WHO CA...S ME BILL. THEY CAME TO TOWN TODAY, I WONDER WHAT—

IT'S A MYSTERY

EXCUSE ME, JESTER?

I ***KNOW*** SHE'S NOT TALKING TO ME.

I SAY, YOU THERE, WITH THE DOOFY HAT AND PARACHUTE PANTS.

WOW. I'M FROZEN WITH RAGE

DO YOU HAPPEN TO KNOW WHERE I CAN FIND DESTINED WARRIORS OF LIGHT?

THEY OFTEN DISGUISE THEMSELVES AS BUFFOONS AND CLOWNS, THUS EXPLAINING WHY I'D ***EVER*** ADDRESS ONE AS RIDICULOUS-LOOKING AS YOURSELF

OKAY.

THAT DOES IT. TIME TO RETALIATE WITHOUT LOOKING.

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NOW IT'S TIME FOR MUR--

MUR

MUR

DER..

MURDER. YEAH.

DAMMIT

TIME FOR MURDER? WHAT KIND OF HORRIBLE.. BLACK MAGE? IS THAT YOU?

WELL, IT ISN'T NOT ME.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN THAT EVEN MORE RIDICULOUS OUT-FIT?

ARE YOU OFFICIALLY A CLOWN?

IT WOULD BE A LATERAL MOVE.

WHAT'S ON THAT DOOR?

IS THAT BLOOD?

NO, DON'T BE SILLY THAT'S NOT BLOOD OR A DOOR. IT'S ART

ART?

CLEARLY

MRNNN.

BUT ART DOESN'T MOAN IN AGONY

SURE IT DOES. IT'S, UH PERFORMANCE ART

SO YOU *ARE* A CLOWN THEN.

TOUCHÉ

AND WHAT IS YOUR ART SUPPOSED TO SAY?

OH, IT'S A COMMENTARY

ON..?

ON HOW TOWNSFOLK NEED TO STOP WALKING UP TO ME WITH ALL THEIR PETTY LITTLE PROBLEMS AND LEARN HOW TO TAKE CARE OF THEIR OWN LIVES OR ELSE END UP MURDERED AND STUFFED IN A BLUE DOOR DOWN A RANDOM ALLEY

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ER, OF COURSE, THOSE BRUTAL MURDERS I MENTIONED, THEY'RE METAPHORICAL. YEAH.

METAPHORICAL

TOTALLY

SEE I CHANNEL MY BLIND, SEETHING RAGE THROUGH THE PRISM OF ART NOW.

IT, UH, SPEAKS OF THE UGLINESS OF VIOLENCE AND HOW WE SHOULD ALL HUG BUNNY RABBITS.

OR *WHATEVER* IT IS PEOPLE WHO AREN'T PSYCHOPATHS DO ALL DAY

IT SEEMS YOU'VE MADE SOME PROGRESS SINCE WE LAST SPOKE.

I CAN SEE THAT ART *IS* YOUR DRIVING PASSION.

EVEN YOUR WARDROBE IS A STATEMENT ABOUT THE REPULSIVENESS OF VIOLENCE THROUGH IMAGE.

NO, THIS IS JUST WHAT I WEAR NOW

OH, I'M SORRY TO HEAR THAT

WHY DON'T WE GO BACK TO MY PLACE AND TALK ABOUT IT SOME MORE.

I COULD SHOW YOU MY "SKETCHES"

OH, *RIGHT*. THE MURDERS.

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I STILL DON'T GET IT YOU BURNED THIS DOWN. I WAS *IN THE FIRE.*

YEAH, IT'S OKAY NOW THOUGH.

THAT DOESN'T EXPLAIN ANYTHING!

NO, THINK ABOUT IT

WITHOUT THINKING ABOUT IT

CRASH!

IF YOU GUYS SEE WHITE MAGE, TELL HER I'M NOT HERE.

WHERE'S HE *GOING*, ANYWAY?

STORAGE ROOM.

BUT THERE ISN'T ONE.

I HAD IT INSTALLED.

WHERE *IS* HE?

HE SAID TO TELL YOU HE'S NOT HERE.

THEN HE HID IN THE STORAGE ROOM.

I COULD SHOW YOU THE WAY

WHY?

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World Energy Supply Threatened in World News

Corneria's Kick Ass Newspaper

25 Gil

Save a Bundle on Foreclosed Property

Contact Garland 666-1598

Teen Magic Potion Abuse on the Rise

Historic Vote May Allow Witch/Dragon Marriage

Masoya is a 400 year old dinner at the black arts. Eight years ago she met a court at a convention that swept her off her feet, and they have been happy ever after. The only problem is, that man is actually a dragon. They cannot marry under current laws. "The lack of hair is what drew me to him." She writes.

[See Disgusting Love Page 7]

"Foster Parent Slayer" Stands Trial Tuesday

In what experts predict to be a legal "slam dunk," Rex Crocker's trial for the murder of at least 6 foster relatives begins tomorrow. A Corneria assistant DA claimed, "I have no doubt we will get a conviction. He wouldn't be a suspect if he was innocent." The death penalty is still a possibility for [See Murderer Page 4]

Two Dozen NPCs Found Dead in Gaia

Blood stains are all that remain in this hospital prison escape. Jessica Moon

One week before the the Non-Profiteering Council (NPC) sponsored protest of cartel price controls, the bodies of twenty-four registered members- known as NPCs- were found in an unoccupied condo in Inter Gala.

"The bodies' Investigator Dorman explained at the press conference, "were mutilated in the most fiendish ways. One victim seemed to have his organs turned inside out and then digested in the stomach. Another had his spine removed through the rectum."

The brutality of these murders has given rise to claims of corporate terrorism and oppression. The NPC strongly advocates outlawing the price controls imposed by contractual cruxes as the consumables, magic, and weapons industries. The NPC argues these supply-restricting agreements between firms, forces consumers to sell goods at half the market price.

"These cruxes force our competition. When they buy their wares from the desperate, and they turn around and sell these goods for twice what they paid." claimed an NPC councilman at a rally protesting Sunday's murders. " They have been strong-arming us for years, and when we rise up, they try to put us down... the deaths of these brave NPCs will only strengthen our resolve!"

The news of these deaths sparked off an early round of NPC protests across the world. Protests in Melbourne turned into fiery riots that destroyed fourteen carriages. The Keifen authorities also sent in reports of riots, but, naturally, no one understood them

"This recent string of murders may be only the latest step in a series of acts of sabotage against the NPC cause. Earlier this month, a protestor radio station that was used to broadcast the NPC manifesto was destroyed in a mysterious air collision.

The cheap, skilled labor force in the Northland republics was a major setback to the increase of international [See NPC Massacre 2]

Insurance Fraud on the Rise.

How you can protect yourself.

Today's Weather

▲ 86 ▼ 65

Five Day Weather Continuation Page 5

Fairy Trafficking Ring Uncovered in Desert

Authorities were initially shocked at the rumors of a caravan selling "unusual living cargo." However, the black market pet sold fairies. "What a waste of time." Said the chief of the sting as the caravan was released.

[See No One Cares Page 4]

CKAN Opinion Section

Page 8

Debate:

"The "Watermelon Campaign"

Left Hand Man Gary

VS

Sulk

Frontera Still Destroyed

Six months after a hellspawn demon razed the city of Frontera, little or no effort has been made to restore the once proud Peon city.

King Steve reported in replies, "Aaron" we all was with Frontera! It was somebody needs to rebuild up because our rubble is in for the taking.

[See Peon Page 6]

BLACK MAGE! ARE YOU IN THERE!

STORAGE ROOM

GOTTA USE MY WITS TO GET OUT OF THIS ONE!

NO!

STORAGE ROOM

DAMN MY WITS!

THEN I WONDER WHERE HE IS.

HM, MAYBE HE'S IN THE REC ROOM.

I DON'T THINK SO.

OKAY.

WHY NOT?

BECAUSE, FIGHTER, I THINK HE'S IN HERE

OKAY.

BUT HE SAID HE WASN'T

LOOK, WE'LL JUST ASK HIM.

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FIGHTER, TRUST ME ON THIS. I AM GOING TO TURN AROUND NOW AND SHOW YOU THAT HE'S IN THAT ROOM.

DARNIT!

BLACK MAGE, YOU COME OUT OF THERE THIS INSTANT!

SHOOMP!

"SHOOMP"?

WHAT'S? THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

IS IT A CODE WORD?

A DARK INCANTATION?

IS IT SLANG?

ARE YOU MAKING FUN OF MY WEIGHT, WHICH IS BOTH HEALTHY ***AND*** APPROPRIATE FOR MY HEIGHT?

HE'S... GONE?

I WON'T SAY I TOLD YOU SO.

I ***WILL*** SAY THAT I TOLD YOU THAT HE WASN'T IN THERE.

I CHOOSE NOT TO QUESTION THIS TURN OF EVENTS.

YEAH, I HAD TO CUT SOME CORNERS.

SURE, I HAD TO FIND A CROOKED CONTRACTOR. GRANTED, HE WASN'T NEARLY CROOKED ENOUGH.

AND, OKAY, SO THE STORAGE ROOM ALSO SERVES AS THE TORPEDO ROOM.

MAYBE THAT'S BECAUSE I THOUGHTLESSLY COMBINED TWO ***WILDLY DIVERGENT*** CONSTRUCTION PLANS OUT OF EXPEDIENCY BUT MAYBE NOT.

WHO KNOWS? NOT ME, I'M NOT A CONTRACTOR.

THE POINT IS, THE AIRSUB MORE OR LESS FUNCTIONS AND THAT'S ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW.

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WELL, I'M SAFE. PROBABLY *FOREVER*

I'LL CELEBRATE BY LEANING AGAINST THIS LANDING GEAR

SO VERY SAFE.

EVEN WITH ALL THE SHODDY REPAIRS AND HALF-ASSED RENOVATIONS, THE *ONE* THING YOU DON'T WANT TO SKIMP ON IS YOUR LANDING GEAR

HEAVENS, NO. SHOULD WE EVER LAND WITHOUT CRASHING, OUR VERY *LIVES* WILL DEPEND UPON THEM.

IT'D BE STUPID TO HAVE LANDING GEAR YOU COULDN'T TRUST

AGREED

HAS BLACK MAGE COME BY HERE? I CAN'T FIND HIM ANYWHERE ON BOARD

I'M SORRY, WHITE MAGE, I COULDN'T HEAR YOU OVER

TAKE-OFF!

I THINK IT'S THE GREEN BUTTON.

THAT WAS THE GREEN *SWITCH*.

BUT I HIT THE

YOU WANT THE BUTTON, TRUST ME

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WAIT, HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT THESE CONTROLS DO?

WHY SHOULDN'T I? I COULD BE A FLYING ACE. YOU DON'T KNOW!

THAT'S *LIKE* AN ARGUMENT

GO AHEAD, PRESS THE BUTTON AND SEE WHAT HAPPENS.

WHAT ABOUT BLACK MAGE?

HE'S FINE THE ONLY WAY OUT IS THROUGH HERE.

SO UNLESS HE CUT A HOLE IN THE METALLIC HULL WITH HIS WEAK NOODLY ARMS, HE HAS TO BE SOMEWHERE ON BOARD

IT'S JUST THAT THERE WAS THIS "SHOOMP" NOISE—

SHOOMP? WHAT IS THAT, SOME KIND OF SLANG?

IT DOESN'T MATTER. THE BUTTON PROBABLY DOES SOMETHING STUPID

LIKE DRAIN HEADLIGHT FLUID OR TURN OFF LIFE SUPPORT

CLICK

SON OF A--!

I'D BE UPSET IF THIS WASN'T EVERYTHING I EVER WANTED IN LIFE.

I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M FREE AFTER ALL THIS TIME!

NOW TO INDULGE IN THE ONLY THING THAT CAN BRING ME JOY IN THIS LIFE

HI!

I'D LIKE TO BE YOUR APPRENTICE TRAINED IN ALL THE WAYS OF COBBLING, I AM.

OH, I DON'T HAVE NEED FOR AN APPRENTICE. JUST NOT ENOUGH BUSINESS.

COBBLEPOT'S COBBLING AND MORE

JUST COBBLING

FAIR ENOUGH, BUT ALLOW ME TO EXPLAIN

COBBLEPOT'S COBBLING AND MORE

UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

REMODELING! PLEASE EXCUSE OUR MESS!

JUST ASSUME THIS IS ALL PAINT OR SOMETHING

I LOVE MY NEW LIFE!

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UNDER NEW MANAGEMEN

JUST ASSUME THIS IS ALL PAINT OR SOMETHING

COBBLEPOT'S COBBLING AND MORE

Just Cobbling

Not Chamberpots

EXCUSE ME, YOUNG MAN.

UH. CAN I HELP YOU?

I'M GOING TO MAKE YOUR LIFE A LIVING HELL FOR THE NEXT TWO HOURS WITH A SERIES OF INCREASINGLY UNREASONABLE [redacted].

I'M OLD, THIS IS WHAT I DO.

SO THAT'S A "NO" THEN?

SO WE HAVE TO GO TO ONRAC?

I BELIEVE SO. MY RESEARCH AND INTERVIEWS IN GAIA INDICATE THAT ONRAC IS THE NEXT LOGICAL STEP.

THEN IT'S SETTLED!

SET SAILS FOR ONRAC, FIGHTER!

BUT WE DON'T HAVE SAILS.

I THOUGHT YOU SAID YOU WERE A PILOT GIMME THOSE CONTROLS.

LET'S NEVER DO THAT AGAIN. 'KAY?

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HOURS LATER.

UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

REMODELING! PLEASE EXCUSE OUR MESS!

JUST ASSUME THIS IS ALL PAINT OR SOMETHING

COBBLEPOT'S COBBLING AND MORE

LADY, YOU'VE TRIED ON EVERY SHOE IN THE STORE, INCLUDING THE MEN'S AND CHILDREN'S SHOES, WHICH CLEARLY WOULDN'T FIT

DON'T YOU TELL ME WHAT WON'T FIT JUST BECAUSE IT'S PHYSICALLY IMPOSSIBLE. I'M OLD AND POSSIBLY SENILE.

AS YOU INSIST ON TELLING ME *EVERY FEW MINUTES*. YES.

NOW YOU COBBLE ME UP A COMFORTABLE PAIR OF SHOES, OR I'LL START MAKING UNREASONABLE DEMANDS THAT I HAVE NO INTENTION OF LETTING YOU FULFIL...

OKAY.

YOU ASKED FOR IT

MEANWHILE.

WHAT A PLEASANT LANDING THAT WAS.

I'LL SAY!

IT INVOLVED A LOT LESS FIRE THAN USUAL TOO.

AND NO BLOOD!

OH, YOU GUYS ARE SUCH JOKESTERS.

I CAN'T HELP BUT NOTICE THAT YOU AREN'T LAUGHING.

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WHAT HAVE WE FOUND OUT SO FAR?

THIS TOWN IS A HOLE.

THIEF!

SORRY.

I PUT TOGETHER A POWERWORD POINT PRESENTATION PRIORITZING THE ACTION ITEMS FOR THIS PARTICULAR PROJECT

IF I MAY?

CERTAINLY.

POINT!

ONRAC WAS ONCE A BUSTLING SEAPORT

SEAPORT (BUSTLING!)

IN ADDITION, THE NEARBY SEA SHRINE PROVIDED A STEADY STREAM OF RELIGIOUS PILGRIMS AND TOURISM.

SEA SHRINE (also BUSTLING!)

THEN THE SEA SHRINE SANK WITHOUT WARNING.

THE PILGRIMAGES CEASED

THIS IS ALSO WHEN, SOME SAY **NOT** COINCIDENTALLY, SEA MONSTER "INCIDENTS" WERE ON THE RISE. WITHIN A MATTER OF MONTHS THE SEA PORT WAS EFFECTIVELY CUT OFF FROM THE WORLD.

shrine!

THE RESULTANT ECONOMIC COLLAPSE REDUCED ONRAC TO, WELL, THIEF WAS RIGHT, TO BE PERFECTLY HONEST

THIS PLACE IS A HOLE.

THEN WE KNOW WHAT MUST BE DONE.

LEAVE BECAUSE IT SUCKS?

NO.

NO, I THINK HE'S RIGHT

UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

WHAT, WHAT *ARE* THESE?

SHOES.

REMODELING! PLEASE EXCUSE OUR MESS!

JUST ASSUME THIS IS ALL PAINT OR SOMETHING

COMPLETELY COMPLETING MORE

THEY *APPEAR* TO BE MADE OUT OF A *FACE*.

NAW

THE EYES ARE STILL THERE.

NO, THOSE ARE UM. UH *NOT* EYES.

I'M GOING TO RUN OUTSIDE SCREAMING NOW.

LOOK. THEY'RE COMFORTABLE SHOES, AREN'T THEY?

WAAAAGH!

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THE NEXT MORNING.

WE'D LIKE A FEW MOMENTS OF YOUR TIME, SIR.

UH...

NEAR MIDNIGHT, A HYSTERICAL WOMAN CAME INTO THE GUARD HOUSE RAVING AND SCREAMING.

SHE WAS LATER IDENTIFIED AS *MS. ELDERLY LADY.*

THAT SOUNDS EXACTLY LIKE SOMEONE I'VE NEVER MET IN MY LIFE.

NOW THAT'S INTERESTING. DON'T ***YOU*** THINK THAT'S INTERESTING?

VERY

SHE CLAIMS THAT SHE VISITED THIS ESTABLISHMENT YESTERDAY EVENING FOR HER WEEKLY SESSION OF ENDLESS YAMMERING.

SHE SAYS A, "HORRIBLE LITTLE MAN" WHO "SMELLED LIKE A BOG ON A HOT DAY," WAITED ON HER POORLY.

Y'KNOW, THAT'S PROBABLY SOMEONE I'M NOT

HAVE I MENTIONED OUR NEW LINE OF BOGWEAR SHOES?

SNIFF SNIFF

COVER UP THAT EMBARRASSING FOOT ODOR WITH THE STENCH OF ROTTING PLANT MATTER.

THAT'S A STUPID LIE AND NO ONE'S GOING TO BELIEVE IT.

DANG.

SHE CLAIMS THAT YOU GAVE HER A PAIR OF SHOES MADE OUT OF A HUMAN FACE

OH, NO. SHE, UH, CAME IN WITH THOSE SHOES.

THAT IS HOW SHE CAME INTO THE GUARD HOUSE.

HIS STORY CHECKS OUT

SHE WAS OBVIOUSLY DERANGED THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP, SIR.

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ONE LAST QUESTION.

I HAVE NOTHING TO HIDE

WHAT'S THAT?

THAT OKAY, WOW IT'S NOT WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE?

LOOKS LIKE A MAN KILLED EITHER BY A FLURRY OF STAB WOUNDS OR FROM HAVING HIS FACE PEELED OFF

RIGHT! SO IT CAN'T *BE* THAT, AS I EXPLAINED JUST NOW.

I THINK HE HAS A POINT

YOU THINK HE HAS A POINT? HIS POINT IS THAT THE CORPSE CAN'T BE A CORPSE *BECAUSE* IT'S A CORPSE. THAT'S NO POINT AT ALL!

WELL IF IT *WAS* A CORPSE, THEN WHY WOULD I LEAVE IT OUT HERE IN THE OPEN LIKE SOME KIND OF *AMATEUR*?

HAD I KILLED SOMEONE LAST NIGHT, I'D HAVE CUT HIS BODY INTO MANAGEABLE PIECES, SCATTERED THEM IN DUMPSTERS ALL OVER TOWN, AND LET THE MEDIEVAL GARBAGE MEN DISPOSE OF ALL THE EVIDENCE FOR ME IN THE MORNING.

OF COURSE, *THAT* PLAN ASSUMES MY KNIFE CAN CUT RIGHT THROUGH BONE, WHICH AS I DISCOVERED LAST NIGHT, IT *CAN'T*.

ER, HYPOTHETICALLY SPEAKING, AS I DON'T HAVE ANY KNIVES.

BESIDES, THAT'S A MANNEQUIN.

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THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR TIME, SIR.

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT OLD MS. ELDERLY LADY WOULD HAVE SNAPPED LIKE THAT

ESPECIALLY SINCE ALL THE EVIDENCE *REALLY* POINTS TO THIS GUY

YEAH, CRAZY WORLD HEY, I HEAR EVIDENCE DOESN'T PROVE A THING!

REALLY?

WOW, WE'VE BEEN GOING ABOUT THIS *ALL WRONG*. WE BETTER GO TELL THE OTHER GUARDS.

THANKS FOR THE TIP!

EVERYTHING IS COMIN' UP BLACK MAGE! THIS WILL MOST LIKELY CONTINUE *FOREVER*

WHAT A HELPFUL CITIZEN.

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SIR, ARE YOU PICTURED HERE?

WHAT? NO, CERTAINLY NOT THAT LOOKS NOTHING LIKE ME

MOST WANTED

FOR QUESTIONING IN INTERNATIONAL SERIAL SLAYINGS, DWARFICIDE, ARSON, AND WANTON ACTS OF APOCALYPSE.

OTHER THAN THE HAT AND FACE, OF COURSE

THEN YOU WON'T MIND TELLING US YOUR NAME

SURE, I DON'T SEE HOW THAT COULD BE ANY HARM.

I'M BLACK MAGE.

BLACK MAGE?

THE INFAMOUS *GUARDSLAYER*?

THE SCOURGE OF CORNERIA?

I MISSPOKE. I WAS CALLED BLACK MAGE BACK IN HIGH SCHOOL.

Y'KNOW, AS AN IRONIC NICKNAME DUE TO MY *OVERWHELMING* HATRED OF PEOPLE NAMED BLACK MAGE

WHO AREN'T ME.

MY *ACTUAL*, NOT MADE UP NAME IS.

Toilet trouble?

Call the Johnsmith!

"PEAS" visit your local grocer

"PEAS" visit your local grocer

GRATHNAR'S BABYSITTING SERVICE

NO MORE TEARS EVER

MOST WANTED

FOR QUESTIONING IN INTERNATIONAL SERIAL

MOS ANTED!

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WHY, HELLO, SARA DEAR! I MUST NOT HAVE SEEN YOU THERE.

THAT'S ODD, CONSIDERING YOU'VE BEEN EXTOLLING THE WONDERS OF AN ALL-AIR DIET FOR THE LAST HOUR

IT'S QUITE MIRACULOUS, REALLY

ALL ONE NEEDS TO DO IS ***RADICALLY*** ALTER THE HUMAN DIGESTIVE TRACT AND METABOLIC PROCESS.

IT WOULD ALSO HELP IF AIR MOLECULES WERE VERY TINY CAKES.

WE'LL HAVE TO GET OUR SCIENTISTS TO WORK ON THAT SOON.

OH, NO. NO NEED I'LL JUST PASS A LAW PROCLAIMING IT TO BE SO

THAT'S GREAT ARE WE DONE WITH AERO-NUTRITIONAL ISSUES?

NUTRINAL, DEAR.

IT'S PRONOUNCED "NUTRINAL"

SURE IT IS. NOW, LIKE I ASKED BEFORE, HOW'S THE WAR GOING?

SMASHINGLY!

WE'LL HAMMER PACIFISM INTO THE ELVES IF WE HAVE TO ***KILL THEM ALL*** TO DO IT.

SO WE'RE ***AT WAR*** TO SPREAD ***PACIFISM*** NOW?

OH, YES. IT WORKS LIKE A CHARM.

HOW?!

WELL, CORPSES ARE ***REMARKABLY*** NON-VIOLENT

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YOU'LL HAVE TO COME WITH US. "MISTER ANTED"

WHAT FOR?

TO BE PERFECTLY FRANK, WE DON'T BELIEVE ANYTHING YOU SAY

OKAY, OKAY YOU GOT ME.

IT'S FOR THE BEST

YOU BETTER LOCK ME UP BEFORE I DO SOMETHING HORRIBLE

LIKE CAST FEATHER-FALL.

WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT THAT?

AND THEN SAY "HADOKEN".

I'M THE SMARTEST PERSON IN THE WORLD

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OKAY THIEF HOW'S THE COMPLETE REVAMP OF ONRAC'S ECONOMY COMING?

WE'RE DEALING WITH A SYSTEM OF SEA-FARING GOODS AND SERVICES THAT IS UTTERLY ENTRENCHED IN THE PSYCHE OF THIS SOCIETY.

IT'S ONLY BEEN A FEW HOURS, WHITE MAGE, I'M NOT A MIRACLE WORKER, Y'KNOW!

ASK ME AGAIN AFTER LUNCH.

RED MAGE, REPORT!

WE MADE VERY LITTLE PROGRESS THIS MORNING.

BUT SINCE I DECIDED I WAS QUALIFIED AS A SITE FOREMAN, CONTRACTOR, AND CIVIL ENGINEER WE'VE PICKED UP THE PACE.

[redacted] INFRASTRUCTURE WILL BE AS GOOD AS NEW THIS TIME TOMORROW

EXCELLENT NEWS. I WON'T KEEP YOU ANY LONGER.

BLACK MAGE, HOW GOES DEMOLITIONS WORK IN THE

BLACK MAGE?

FIGHTER! THERE YOU ARE. HAVE YOU SEEN BLACK MAGE TODAY?

UH, NOPE!

TSK. HE HAS ONE SIMPLE JOB CONSISTING OF THE ***ONLY*** THING HE SEEMS CAPABLE OF, AND HE CAN'T EVEN BE BOTHERED TO SHOW UP AND DO IT.

WAS THAT RIGHT?

You're stupid and ugly!

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WHITE MAGE, YOU LIGHT WARRIORS HAVE DONE SO MUCH FOR OUR MISERABLE LITTLE SPIT OF A TOWN.

OH, MAYOR

YOU FLATTER ME.

I'M NO LIGHT WARRIOR. I MERELY CANNOT BE IDLE WHILE OTHERS SUFFER.

ONRAC'S TRANSFORMATION IS NOTHING SHORT OF A MIRACLE. THE SPIRIT OF THE TOWN IS REVIVED!

SO WHAT IF THE SEA SHRINE FELL INTO THE OCEAN AND AN ENDLESS WAVE OF MONSTERS FROM THE DEEP KEEP US PRISONERS IN OUR OWN HOMES?

WE'VE GOT A COMMUNITY CENTER NOW! ISN'T IT JUST GLORIOUS?

IF I MAY, IS IT NOT FOLLY TO PIN THE HOPES AND DREAMS OF A PEOPLE ON THE FATE OF A BUILDING?

IS THAT NOT *PRECISELY* WHAT LED TO ONRAC'S RUIN WHEN THE SEA SHRINE FELL?

MY THEORY IS THAT EVERYTHING WILL BE FINE

COMMUNITY CENTER

THIS IS BAD.

WHITE MAGE? I HAVE A NEW THEORY NOW.

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QUICK, MOBILIZE RESCUE TEAMS!

THERE'S NO TELLING HOW MANY SURVIVORS THERE ARE TRAPPED UNDER THE DEBRIS!

THUD!

HIYA.

BLACK MAGE, IF **YOU** ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT...

DEFINE "THAT"

TOSSING ANOTHER LAYER OF RUBBLE ON TOP OF POTENTIAL SURVIVORS, ***CRUSHING THEM TO DEATH.***

WHAT? NO!

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW HEAVY THAT THING IS?

I DO, IT WAS ON TOP OF ME

SO I USED THE BLACKEST MAGICS OF THE UNDERWORLD TO ANIMATE THE ***DOZENS OF CORPSES*** SURROUNDING ME AND MADE ***THEM*** THROW IT ASIDE

ALSO, IT WASN'T "ON TOP OF ME" SO MUCH AS "KINDA IN MY WAY"

IT JUST DIDN'T FEEL RIGHT TO WALK AROUND, Y'KNOW?

FOR SOMETHING SO TRIVIAL, YOU THOUGHT NOTHING OF MURDER AND NECROMANCY?!

IT'S A WORD VERY MUCH ***LIKE*** THAT

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I HATE COMMUNITY CENTERS!

ALSO TOWERS!

IF ONLY THERE WERE SOME WAY TO DESTROY BOTH.

NOT IF I CAN STOP YOU, MONSTER

EVEN IF IT **DOES** INTERRUPT MY CHARITY WORK OR WHATEVER

HA, I ALREADY DID IT.

ARGH! HE DID IT WHILE I WAS DOING A GOOD DEED THAT I CAN'T THINK OF NOW

AND THAT'S THE COMPLETELY LOGICAL STORY OF WHAT **REALLY** HAPPENED

WHAT KIND OF **IDIOT** DO YOU TAKE ME FOR?

THE KIND THAT'S BEEN WOOED BY MY TALES OF VALOR AND IS READY TO **DO IT** ON TOP OF ALL THESE DEAD PEOPLE?

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I THINK WE ALL LEARNED A LESSON HERE TODAY.

THAT PEANUT BUTTER AND HAM SANDWICHES ARE ONLY *HALF* AS GOOD AS THEY SOUND?

TWO LESSONS.

THE FIRST, PEANUT BUTTER AND HAM SAND-WICHES.

I REALLY *THOUGHT* I WAS ON TO SOMETHING THERE.

THE SECOND, *IT NEVER PAYS TO HELP PEOPLE.*

COULDN'T AGREE MORE TO THAT

Y'KNOW, I SORT OF ASSUMED THIS HERO OF DESTINY THING WOULD INVOLVE A LOT LESS DEVASTATION IN OUR [illegible].

IN OUR DEFENSE, THOSE CITIES *MIGHT* HAVE BURNED DOWN ON THEIR OWN.

THAT WE *WERE* THERE EVERY TIME IT HAPPENED IS POSSIBLY A COIN-CIDENCE.

EXACTLY

BESIDES, THESE THINGS WOULDN'T HAPPEN IF THEY DIDN'T BUILD CITIES IN OUR WAY

BUT DOESN'T IT BOTHER ANY-ONE ELSE THAT IT *IS* THIS WAY?

I MEAN, THERE'S GOT TO BE A REASON FOR IT, RIGHT?

HIDE ME, HIDE ME, HIDE ME, HIDE ME, HIDE ME!

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WELL, SHE *LOOKS* SEA WORTHY

BUT SARDA SAID IT WOULD KILL US IF WE TOOK IT IN THE WATER.

WHAT'S THAT WINDBAG KNOW?

EVERYTHING

YOU'RE FORGETTING THAT I *UPGRADED* THE AIR-SUB.

IT WORKS PROPERLY NOW. EVEN SAFER THAN BEFORE, REALLY

I GAVE THE CONTRACTOR EXPLICIT ORDERS TO CUT EVERY CORNER POSSIBLE

I DON'T THINK THAT'S QUITE

CURVED SURFACES MEANS LESS HEAD TRAUMA! NEATO!

YOU KNOW WHAT, THAT'S COMPLETELY RIGHT WE SHOULD BOARD NOW.

WHY ARE YOU IN SUCH A HURRY?

HAVE YOU NOT *SEEN* THAT HAMMER?

IMAGINE, IF YOU WILL, THE STATE OF AN ANT HILL AFTER PUSHING A CLUB THROUGH IT. I DO NOT WISH TO LEARN WHAT THE ANT HILL KNOWS OF PAIN.

I DON'T WANT TO GET TOO GRAPHIC, BUT I'D MUCH PREFER SHE JUST HIT ME WITH IT

WE HAVE PASSED THAT POINT, HOWEVER.

THIS NEW POINT, WHERE WE ARE NOW, IT IS A POINT OF NO RETURN.

NOW GET ON THAT AIR-SUB SO THAT MY *PRECIOUS* ORIFICES MAY REMAIN PURE.

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WELL.

WE'RE STILL BREATHING.

GIVE IT TIME

DO WE HAVE ANY IDEA *WHERE* WE'RE GOING?

OF COURSE. THE *SEA SHRINE*, DUH.

YOU COULD HAVE SAID "VALHALLA" AND THAT'D BE AN EQUALLY USELESS ANSWER BECAUSE *WE DON'T KNOW WHERE THAT IS EITHER.*

MY GUESS IS THAT IF THE SEA SHRINE SANK, THEN IT *SUNK*

THAT'S.. THAT'S GREAT, FIGHTER

REALLY GREAT

I USED MY LOGIC TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM

YOU CAN USE YOUR SILENCE TO PROTECT YOUR ORGANS TOO.

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WE HAVE ALWAYS LIVED IN THE OCEAN

THERE IS NO PLACE FOR TIME HERE AMONG THE DARK. AMONG THE ALIEN THINGS THAT CRAWL AND SWIM IN A SEA WITHOUT LIGHT WE ARE ONE OF THEM NOW

THERE IS NO *BEFORE*. THERE WILL BE NO AFTER

WE HAVE *ALWAYS* BEEN ONE OF THEM.

BLACK MAGE?

YOU'RE NARRATING AGAIN

MY COMPANIONS SUCCUMBED TO SEA MADNESS WEEKS AGO.

DUDE. IT'S BEEN TWO AND *A HALF* HOURS.

I ALONE MAINTAIN A GLIMMER OF HUMANITY

I FEAR IT IS FADING FAST.

WHAT KIND OF DARK WIZARD IN LEAGUE WITH NAMELESS FORCES OF PRIMORDIAL EVIL *ARE* YOU THAT YOU CAN'T EVEN MAKE A SUCCESSFUL SANITY CHECK VERSUS *BOREDOM*?

I IGNORED THE PITIABLE BABBLING THAT ISSUED FROM THEIR MISSHAPEN LIPS.

THEIR WET GURGLES, A NOISE THAT HAD ONCE BEEN WORDS, CAME TO AN END WHEN ONE OF THE *THINGS* OUTSIDE ASSAULTED OUR CRAFT

I WELCOME DEATH.

AWW LI'L GUY'S KINDA CUTE.

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OKAY, SO HOW DO WE KILL IT?

FIRE MAKES THINGS DEAD. LET'S USE FIRE

WOW I'M SURPRISED YOU DIDN'T SUGGEST SWORDS.

UM, RM? IT'S KINDA HARD TO SWORDFIGHT UNDER WATER.

YOUR PLAN IS TO USE FIRE.

AND YOUR POINT IS...?

WE'RE UNDER WATER!

SO WE'LL HAVE TO MAKE SOME FIRE

PSST

BETWEEN YOU AND ME, I DON'T THINK RED MAGE IS TOO SMART

YOU KNOW HE'S STANDING RIGHT HERE.

DUH. THAT'S WHY I SAID "PSST" I'M WHISPERING NOW.

YOU'RE NOT

YOU'RE TOTALLY NOT

PSST

LOOK, THIS IS AN AIR SUB, SO IT'S GOT TORPEDOES, RIGHT?

ARE YOU REALLY SUGGESTING WE SHOOT EXPLOSIVES AT A TARGET THAT'S THREE INCHES FROM OURSELVES?

NOT SUGGESTING, NO.

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BUBBLE

ARE YOU GLAD BLACK MAGE IS ON THE TEAM? BECAUSE I'M VERY GLAD THAT BLACK MAGE IS ON THE TEAM.

JUST SO YOU GUYS KNOW, I'M NOT IMMEDIATELY BLAMING BLACK MAGE TO BEST DEFLECT CRITICISM FROM THE SIGNIFICANT AND SLIPSHOD ALTERATIONS THAT WERE MADE TO THE AIR-SUB ON MY BEHALF NO SIR

YES, WE ALL KNOW THIS IS BLACK MAGE'S DOING.

IT WILL BE ***WORTH*** DYING JUST TO KNOW YOU JERKS ARE DEAD TOO.

OH, ***PLEASE*** DEATH IS FOR NPCS. I'LL JUST POP THE DRAIN AND LET ALL THE WATER OUT

THINK ABOUT THAT FOR A MINUTE.

WHAT IS GOING TO RUSH IN HERE AND DROWN US INSTANTLY WHEN YOU DO THAT?

NOTHING BECAUSE IT'S THE PERFECT PLAN?

THINK HARDER

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In the beginning, there was naught but the blackest depths. A great nothing without beginning or end.

Then there was light.

It cut the darkness like a blade and from that wound poured all of the earth and the seas.

Enraged by the light's arrogance, the dark made to swallow up the whole of the earth and the seas once more.

But the Trickster so loved the world that he hid it from the darkness in his bag. So too did he hide the light to look upon the world he coveted.

words by Shay, pictures by Jarrad. Copyright 2006

"I know why you hide!" the darkness howled with a thousand voices. "But wherever you run, know that I will already be there."

And so man walked across all the lands and sailed across all the seas. On all his travels he met the animals and the fish and the birds and the forests, and his shadow asked, "But what are those?"

Words by Brian, pictures by Jarrod. Copyright 2006

The screaming rumbling darkness spreads to the world. I told you it was already here. Monsters and nameless things trample Mya as a tiny bit of shadow races into his world.

words by Brian, pictures by Jarrod. Copyright 2006

Darkness swept across the land and the seas and still more shadows came through the hole in the edge of the world.

"There is nowhere to run," said the Dark in a thousand voices. "No matter where you go, we are already there!"

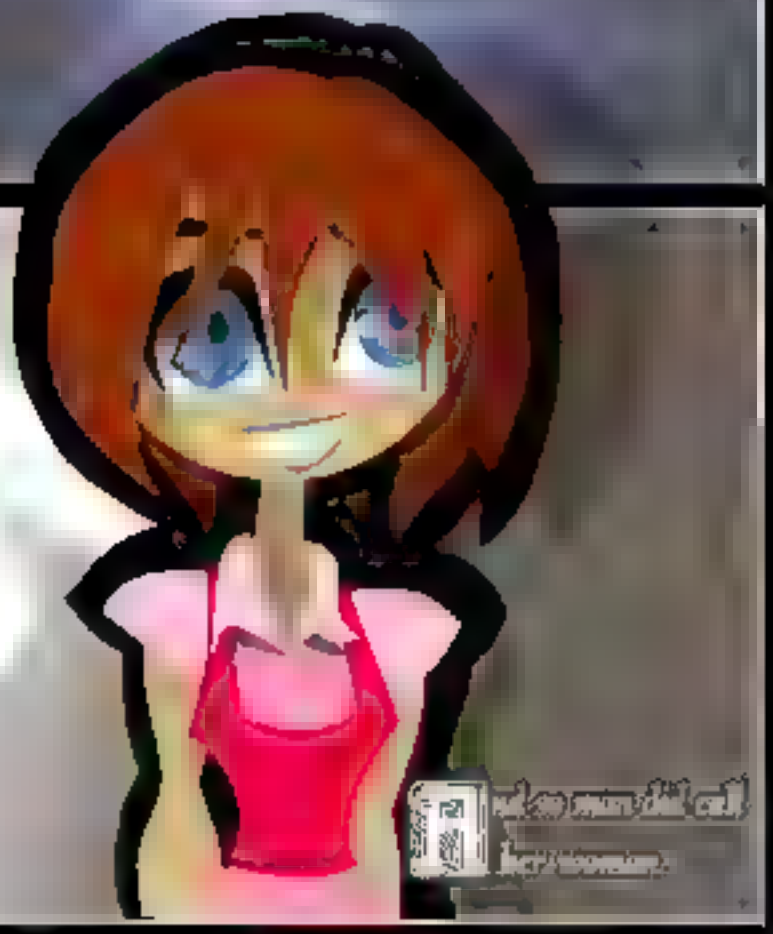
"Still, you must catch me!" And so the darkness and the light began their great chase across the sky, one after another. And so Man did call the darkness Night.

words by Brian, pictures by Jarrod. Copyright 2005

"You brought darkness into my world," said the Trickster. "May it be in your heart forever." And so man was besought by grief and fear and age and want and hunger and despair.

Though harried forever due to Man, the Light could not behold such dire punishment. As Light had carved the world from darkness, so too did it carve a companion for man from the world.

Earth enough to provide a vessel, water enough to provide blood, air enough to provide breath, and fire enough to provide life



"But the hour is late, our cups are dry, and my tale is told.

SO DID THIS OPEN UP A SIDE-QUEST OR WHAT?

I THINK HE WANTS A TIP WE MUST FLEE.

THIS STORY? THIS IS A CROCK

SO WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS THAT A SWORD OF LIGHT SOLVED EVERY PROBLEM IN THE UNIVARSE?

The End

words by Brien, pictures by Jarrod. Copyright 2006

WAIT I'M CONFUSED

TEN SECONDS AGO WE WERE IN VERY SERIOUS DANGER OF DROWNING DUE TO PROBABLY SOMETHING I DIDN'T DO.

NOT TO COMPLAIN, BUT WHERE DID THE DOOM WATER GO?

I HAVE A STORY TO TELL!

NOW I'M COMPLAINING. WHERE DID THE DOOM WATER GO!

WHEN THE AIR-SUB FILLED UP WITH WATER, I SUNK 'CAUSE OF MY DOUBLE AWESOME ARMOR AND JUNK.

SO I FOUND THE DRAIN IN THE FLOOR, REMOVED THE PLUG, AND LET ALL THE WATER OUT, SAVING US ALL.

IT'S TIMES LIKE THESE THAT MAKE ME GLAD TO BE THE KIND OF PERSON WHO SAYS "I TOLD YOU SO"

BECAUSE I DID

NO, I'M SORRY. I REFUSE TO TAKE PART IN ANY OF THIS. IF YOU NEED ME, I'LL BE IN MY ROOM.

WE HAVE OUR OWN ROOMS?

NOPE

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WHY DIDN'T ANY-ONE *TELL* ME THAT WAS AN EXIT?

IT'S THE AIRLOCK.

THERE'S A BIG SIGN.

I THOUGHT IT WAS A PRANK.

PRANK

Y'KNOW, LIKE, "HA-HA, YOU DON'T HAVE A ROOM." A PRANK

YOU HAD TO ***DISENGAGE*** THREE DIFFERENT SAFETIES.

A REALLY **COMPLEX** PRANK

CAN WE GET BACK ON TASK AND FIND THE SUNKEN SEA SHRINE DEDICATED TO GODS WHO ARE PROBABLY VERY NICE AND WILL KEEP US SAFE FROM MONSTERS LIKE THE ONE OUTSIDE?

FAULTLESS PLAN AS ALWAYS, RM!

SURE, IF YOU IGNORE THE FACT THAT SEA GODS ARE NOTORIOUSLY INHUMAN JACK ASSES MORE INCLINED TO DEVOUR US THAN TO

DONE!

CLICK

THAT WAS AN ADMONISHMENT, NOT ENDORSEMENT!

SORRY, BLACK MAGE, I CAN'T HEAR YOU OVER THE INCREDIBLY GOOD IDEAS I'M ACTING UPON!

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THE SEA SHRINE'S IN THERE.

IT MUST BE.

FIGHTER.

THAT'S A CAVE

RIGHT!

SHRINES ARE VERY LARGE BUILDINGS.

RIGHT!

VERY LARGE BUILDINGS ***CAN'T FIT*** INSIDE TINY CAVES.

I DON'T FOLLOW

ALLOW ME TO DEMONSTRATE BY SLICING YOUR NECK WIDE OPEN.

EDUCATION AHOY!

QUIET!

DO YOU SMELL THAT?

THAT MAKES NO SENSE.

METHINKS A TURTLE DOTH APPROACH.

THAT MAKES EVEN LESS SENSE.

I'VE GOT A NOSE FOR THIS SORT OF THING.

FOR TURTLES.

THAT ARE UNDERWATER

WHILE YOU'RE LOCKED IN AN AIR-TIGHT CAN.

OH, YEAH. ***BIG*** TIME.

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TOLD YOU

OH, WHO CARES. IT'S JUST AN UNUSUALLY LARGE TURTLE. IT'S NOT LIKE THAT BIG FISH EVER POSED A THREAT

BUT IT COULD HAVE

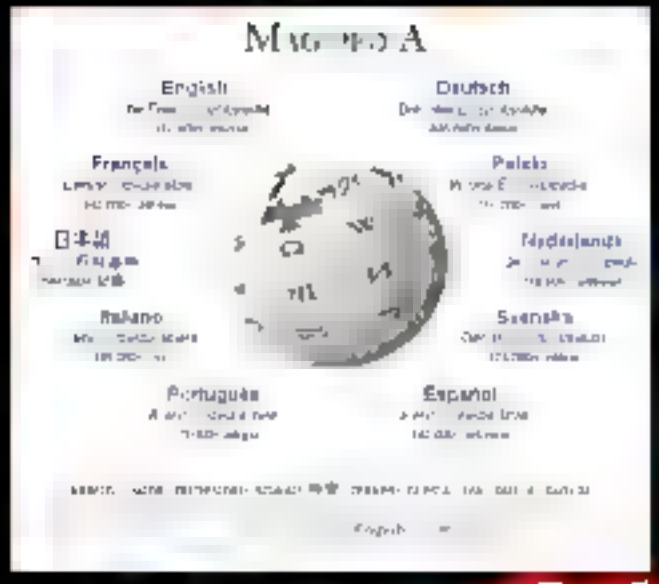
IT WAS A FISH. MENTALLY, THEY'RE LIKE PLANTS THAT MOVE.

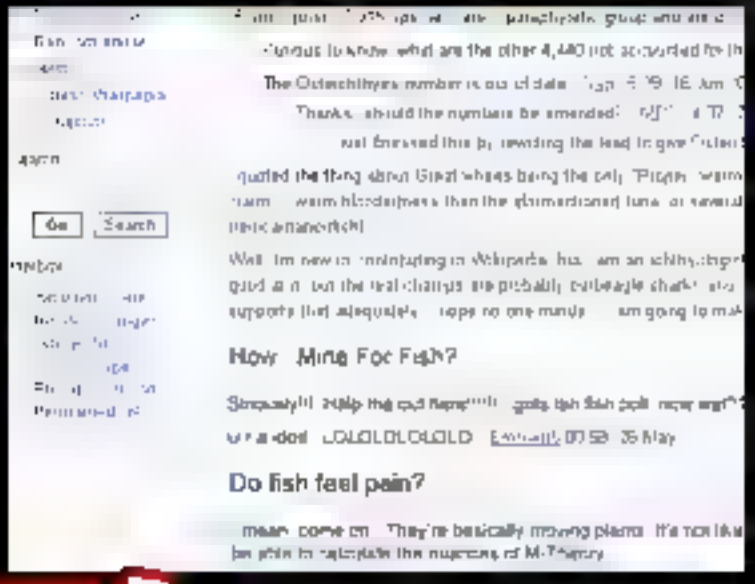
IT PAINS ME TO SAY THIS, BUT THAT MIGHT MAKE IT DUMBER THAN YOU.

YEAH? WE'LL SEE ABOUT *THAT!*

AH, BUT TURTLES AREN'T FISH.

YOU CAN'T PROVE THAT





FAIR ENOUGH.

BUT I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT

WE HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR FROM THIS GENTLE SEA BEAST

BAM! BAM! BAM!

UNLESS IT'S A RAGE TURTLE

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DOES SOMEONE WANT TO EXPLAIN THAT RACKET?

IT'S NOTHING. JUST A *RAGE TURTLE* TRYING TO KILL US.

RAGE *TURTLE*, YOU SAY?

YEAH, WHY?

EXCUSE ME, CONTRACTOR. I'VE GOT A QUICK QUESTION ABOUT THE BILL.

"TURTLE-PROOFING"?

Catering
Flowers
Petty Cash
Petty Thievery
Sound Proofing
Turtle-Proofing
Proof Reading
Weather Proofing
Weather Sealant
Whether Or Not

Y'KNOW IN CASE OF RABID TURTLES.

YEAH, I DON'T THINK SO. NICE TRY THOUGH.

OH, NO REASON. BUT LET'S KILL IT *QUICKLY*

RED MAGE, *YOU'RE* OUR FRACTACTICAL GENIUS..

WELL I *DO* LIKE TO BRAG

THINK OF SOME-THING!

BAM! BAM! BAM! BAM!

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN MY SHEER GENIUS BAFFLES EVEN IT-SELF

GENTLEMAN, *THIS* IS ONE OF THOSE TIMES.

WE'RE GOING TO FIRE BLACK MAGE AT IT.

THERE'S A PART OF THIS PLAN I DON'T LIKE.

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I CAN'T DECIDE IF THIS IS INSPIRED OR *INSANE*

IT'S A FINE LINE I SEE IT EVERY DAY AS I RUN BY SCREAMING. WITH SCISSORS

YOU ARE NOT INSTILLING ME WITH A GREAT DEAL OF *CONFIDENCE*, RM.

NO. NO TRUST ME THIS TIME SCIENCE IS WORKING *FOR* US.

AGAIN, THERE'S THAT CONFIDENCE THING.

SILENCE!

BEHOLD NATURE'S SINISTER BALLET!

GNOOOR!

THE KEY TO VICTORY IS THAT TURTLES ARE NATURAL PREDATORS OF SEA CUCUMBERS.

SO RAGE TURTLES ARE NATURAL PREDATORS OF RAGE SEA CUCUMBERS.

THEREFORE [illegible]

LET ME KNOW WHEN THIS IS SUPPOSED TO START MAKING SENSE.

DON'T YOU KNOW *ANYTHING* ABOUT HOW A SEA CUCUMBER DEFENDS ITSELF?

PRETEND I DON'T

ONLY IN THE MOST LOGICAL WAY POSSIBLE.

WOW!

WOW, THE RAGE TURTLE IS *ACTUALLY* LEAVING

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT WORKED!

WELL, I *DID* CALCULATE A 148.6% CHANCE OF SUCCESS.

SO HOW DO WE RETRIEVE BLACK MAGE?

RETRIEVE BLACK MAGE

YEAH.

YOU WANTED HIM *BACK*?

HE HAS HIS USES. THERE COULD BE MORE RAGE TURTLES, Y'KNOW

YOUR EXPECTATION OF RETRIEVAL IS THE KIND OF INFORMATION I *COULD HAVE* USED WHEN FORMULATING THE BRILLIANT COURSE OF ACTION.

GLURG.

SEE? HE USED HIS OWN EJECTED ORGANS AS A LASSO AND DRAGGED HIMSELF BACK ONBOARD, JUST AS I PROBABLY MEANT FOR HIM TO DO.

GLAG!

OH, NO NEED TO THANK ME, BM.

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WELL, THAT'S THE WORST THING I'LL *EVER* SEE.

KRUNCH!

OH, YE GODS

THAT'S WHAT I GET FOR DARING THE UNIVERSE.

RED MAGE, WE'RE FRIENDS, AREN'T WE?

WE ARE?

NO.

THREE MINUTES AGO, IN THE STORAGE CLOSET

I FAIL TO UNDERSTAND ***HOW*** HE CONVINCED YOU TO GO THROUGH WITH THE PLAN IN THE FIRST PLACE.

OH, HE ***DIDN'T***

HEYA, BLACK MAGE! WHAT'RE YOU DOIN'?

STUPID RED MAGE STUPID PUSHED ME IN HERE FOR SOME STUPID REASON.

NOW WHAT ARE ***YOU*** DOING HERE AND HOW DO I MAKE YOU ***GO AWAY?***

TRYIN' TO PULL OPEN THIS HATCH IN THE FLOOR

HATCH IN THE — IT SAYS "PUSH" IN BOLD LETTERS.

PULLING IS A ***KIND*** OF PUSHING.

OUTTA THE WAY, BRAIN-DEXTER

KHOOM!

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IF YOU DIDN'T WANT TO PARTICIPATE, THEN WHY'D YOU EJECT YOUR ORGANS?

I OPENED MY MOUTH TO SCREAM

HALF TERROR, HALF JOY

AT THE PROSPECT OF MY DOOM.

WITH ALL THE PRESSURE DOWN HERE, WELL, IMAGINE A *BIG* TOOTHPASTE TUBE

WHICH, AS FAR AS ANYONE KNOWS, IS *EXACTLY* WHAT I KNEW WOULD HAPPEN.

C'MERE.

WE'RE NOT DONE BEING *FRIENDS*.

SMASH!

OKAY THERE'S GOING TO BE A *LOT* OF TALK ABOUT WHO GOT BORED, WENT TO THE ENGINE ROOM, AND STARTED TOUCHING JUNK

NOW BEFORE ANYONE ASKS, I JUST WANT TO SAY THAT I DIDN'T PUT THE BOTTOM OF THE OCEAN DOWN THERE.

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WE FOUND **AND** BREACHED THE SEA SHRINE ALL THANKS TO FIGHTER'S BRILLIANT DISPLAY OF NAVAL ABILITY

IT'S BECAUSE I DO ONE HUNDRED SIT-UPS **EVERY** DAY!

LET'S NOT DWELL ON THAT STATEMENT

DOESN'T ANYONE ELSE FIND IT **STRANGE** THAT THERE'S NOT ONLY ADEQUATE LIGHT DOWN HERE, BUT THAT THERE'S ALSO A VERY BREATHABLE ATMOSPHERE?

LUCKILY, IT'S MY POLICY THAT **THOSE** ARE THE KINDS OF DETAILS THAT CAN BE SAFELY IGNORED

CLICK

NOBODY PANIC I HAVE DARKVISION.

I'LL JUST LOOK AROUND**WHY DOESITHAVESEVEN MOUTHS?!**

YEEAARRGH!

[illegible] MOUTHS, HUH? I WONDER IF IT'S NICE OR **REALLY** NICE

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CLICK

INTRUDERS!

THAT'S NOT A SEVEN-MOUTHED ELDER GOD. THAT'S NOT A SEVEN-MOUTHED ELDER GOD AT ALL!

NO I BET WE PROBABLY WORSHIP ONE THOUGH!

AND WE'RE GONNA FEED YOU TO HIM.

OR HER

OR IT.

GREAT, JUST WHEN I THOUGHT WE'D LIVE THROUGH ANOTHER DAY, WE GET DOOMED

YOU'RE NOT GOING TO HAVE INCEST AT US FIRST, ARE YOU?

NO, WE DON'T DO THAT!

ANY MORE!

AS MUCH!

HOLD ON, DIDN'T WE SLAUGHTER YOU GUYS?

NO.

NO, I'M PRETTY SURE WE DID

SILENCE!

IT IS *WE* WHO HAVE CAPTURED YOU. AGAIN!

YEAH, HOW'D THAT WORK OUT FOR YOU GUYS LAST TIME?

OH, RIGHT, SLAUGHTER.

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JUST BRING US TO THE HIDEOUS EYE-STALK YOU WORSHIP SO WE CAN RE-SLAUGHTER YOU.

OH, WE DON'T WORSHIP THAT ANY MORE WE MOVED ON TO UR

HER? I KNOW HE'S GOT LONG HIPPY HAIR AND DRESSES, BUT HE'S A H.M.

WORDS HURT BLACK MAGE

NO, UR

WHO?

NO HU'S A JERK.

BLACK MAGE!

NO, I GET IT

OKAY I GET IT

WHO IS THE GOD YOU WORSHIP?

NO, HU'S A JERK

BLACK MAGE!

WOW, LOOK AT ALL THE HARDCORE RUNNING INTO THAT I JUST DID

AT LEAST THEY DIDN'T ASK WHO STINKS THE MOST

BLACK MAGE!

OH, GOD DAMMIT.

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ENOUGH BUFFOONERY

IF IT WAS THAT SIMPLE, DO YOU THINK I'D BE DRESSED LIKE THIS?

YOU THWARTED US UPON THE BARREN ICE, BUT WE SHALL BE V CTORS THIS DAY!

ISN'T IT CONFUSING FOR YOU GUYS TO ALL HAVE THE SAME NAM

SHUT UP.

WHAT'S YOUR PLAN NOW? SEX WITH SQUIRRELS, PLANTS, OR THE DEAD?

OUR WAYS ARE MAN FOLD, YES

AND FUN!

THAT'S NOT THE POINT.

WE WILL BRING UR INTO THIS MISERABLE WORLD

UR, WHO IS THE DARK BEFORE THE LIGHT

UR, WHO S THE ROOT OF DECAY THAT GNAWS AT ALL LIFE UR WHO IS THE ENDER OF ALL THINGS

I HAVE A QUESTION.

AT ANY GIVEN POINT IN H.STORY THERE ARE DOOMSDAY CULTS.

SUCH AS YOURSELVES.

FOR A THOUSAND YEARS YOUR KIND HAS STRIVEN FOR AND PREACHED AN END OF TIMES THAT WILL NEVER BE.

YOUR QUESTION?

MY QUESTION IS:

WHAT'S IT *LIKE* TO BE AS STUPID AS YOU ARE UGLY?

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LET'S LIE DOWN SOME GROUND WORK FIRST.

YOU ARE PRESUPPOSING A VALUE PARALLEL TO INTELLIGENCE AND AESTHETICS.

THIS IS A TREACHEROUS TERRAIN, AS THERE ARE MANY TYPES OF INTELLIGENCE AND *MANY* VARIATIONS ON THE CONCEPT OF BEAUTY

THE LATTER CAN BE PARTICULARLY SUBJECTIVE. WHAT MAY BE BEAUTIFUL IN ONE INSTANCE MAY BE REPULSIVE IN ANOTHER

THIS IS COMPLICATED EVEN FURTHER BY THE EXPERIMENTAL CONTEXT OF THE WITNESSES. A THING MAY QUALIFY AS BEAUTIFUL IN ALL RESPECTS, BUT FALL SHORT OF THAT IDEAL DUE TO THE PERSONAL OPINIONS OR BIASES OF ITS AUDIENCE

IN THAT INSTANCE, CAN IT BE SAID THAT THE THING POSSESSES BEAUTY?

FURTHER, DOES *ANYTHING* ACTUALLY POSSESS A QUALITY OF BEAUTY? OR DO WE MEAN BY "BEAUTY" MERELY THAT QUALITY WHICH WE, AS SAPIENT BEINGS, FIND PLEASING IN SOME WAY?

HOW THEN ARE WE TO EXPLAIN THE FREQUENCY WITH WHICH INDIVIDUALS CAN AGREE UPON BEAUTY IN THE GENERAL SENSE?

WHILE SPECIFIC ELEMENTS MAY BE QUESTIONED BY ONE PARTY OR ANOTHER, THERE IS A SENSE OF COMMON GROUND IN REGARDS TO THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR BEAUTY IN GENERAL

IT IS THIS SENSE TO WHICH WE APPEAL WHEN WE SPEAK OF BEAUTY OR VISUAL DISSONANCE WITH ANOTHER

BUT WHAT IS TO BE DONE WHEN THE GENERAL ELEMENTS CANNOT BE AGREED UPON EITHER?

THAT IS THE PRIMARY SOURCE OF FRICTION IN YOUR QUERY

I WAS BEING *RHETORICAL*

SORRY

I WAS A PHILOSOPHY MAJOR, SO NJTJOB CULTIST IS THE ONLY JOB I CAN HOLD.

LOOK, GUYS.

I'M ON YOUR SIDE HERE.

NO ONE HAS WORKED HARDER FOR GLOBAL APOCALYPSE THAN ME. JUST TAKE YOUR TENTACLE INCEST CAMP SOMEWHERE ELSE SO WE DON'T HAVE TO LOOK AT YOU ANY MORE

AND SO WE CAN RAISE THE SEA SHRINE AND CLAIM THE ORB OF WATER FOR THE GOOD OF ALL MANKIND

THAT'S WHAT WE'RE DOING?

HECK, IT WAS ***YOUR*** IDEA TO COME HERE.

IT WAS MY ***IDEA*** TO AVOID WHITE MAGE'S ***VIVID*** IMAGINATION AT ANY COST

WELL, TOO BAD. WE'RE ALREADY DOWN HERE, SO IT'S TOO LATE TO NOT SAVE THE WORLD.

I FOUND A LOOPHOLE

AH. SO YOU DID

FINALLY!

I'M NOT THE UGLIEST MALCONENT IN THE GROUP

WE CAN HEAR YOU

YEAH, NO ONE CARES, FUGLY

TAKE THE PRISONERS TO...UH THAT PLACE WHERE THEY GO.

WE DON'T TAKE ORDERS FROM YOU

OR ***DO*** YOU?

NO, WE DON'T.

OR ***DO*** YOU?

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IF YOU TRULY WISH TO JOIN OUR GLORIOUS RANKS, THEN YOU MUST COMPLETE THE RITUAL

SOUNDS EASY

OKAY, FIRST, WE CHOP OFF YOUR HEAD

MM-HMM

THEN WE IMPLANT THE FESTERING LARVA OF AN OLD ONE IN YOUR NECK IT SORT OF TAKES OVER YOUR HUSK FROM THERE

I SEE

AND THAT'S IT REALLY

GOOD TO KNOW, GOOD TO KNOW

HEY, LIGHT WARRIORS!

OH, HI THERE, BRINGERS OF DARKNESS AND ETERNAL WOE.

THEY ARE *SO* NICE

THEY DIDN'T IMPRISON US OR *ANYTHING*. DID YOU NOTICE THAT?

YEAH, *REAL* NICE. THEY HAVEN'T "IMPRISONED" US BECAUSE WE'RE IN A TEMPLE AT THE *BOTTOM OF THE OCEAN*

IF WE LEAVE, WE DIE.

WHAT ABOUT THE AIRSUB?

THAT'D BE A FINE OPTION IF SOMEONE HADN'T *GIVEN THEM THE KEYS*.

I THOUGHT HE WAS THE VALET

WHY WOULD A SUNKEN SHRINE HAVE VALET PARKING?

TO PROVIDE A HIGHER LEVEL OF EXCE...ENCE FOR THE MODERN ADVENTURER ON THE GO?

COMPLETELY JUSTIFIED!

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I MUST NOW PREPARE THE DREAD RITUAL THAT WILL GIVE OUR LORD A NEW LIFE TO USHER IN AN AGE OF EVER-LASTING NIGHT

THAT'S QUITE A LORD

INDEED. HE, SHE, OR IT IS!

WHAT, DON'T YOU KNOW?

THE TEXTS CONCERNING OUR LORD WERE WRITTEN IN A LANGUAGE THAT DIED BEFORE TIME BEGAN.

AND UNDERSTANDING A SINGLE PASSAGE DESTROYS THE MIND OF HE WHO READS IT

SO, YES CERTAIN DETAILS REMAIN UNCLEAR TO US.

BUT IT'S A *VERY* DREAD LORD, WE KNOW THAT

OH YEAH, CLEARLY THE DREADIEST

COUGH!

I'LL LEAVE YOU WITH SUH'ZAHNE HE'LL TAKE CARE OF YOUR BEHEADING AND IMPLANT.

HI.

DOESNT IT CONCERN YOU THAT YOUR CULT WORSHIPS ANCIENT POWERS BEYOND TIME AND DEATH USING DOCUMENTS YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND THAT DRIVE YOU MAD WHEN YOU *DO* UNDERSTAND THEM?

BUDDY, IF I BOTHERED TO THINK LIKE THAT, WOULD I BE STANDING HERE TODAY WITH AN OCTOPUS-GOD LARVA GROWING OUT OF MY NECK?

WELL, I..

YOU COULD UH.

THAT'S A. THAT'S A POINT

MORE OR LESS.

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SO. HOW D'YA WANNA DO THIS?

WITH A KNIFE

NO TIME-WASTER, YOU.

I LIKE WHAT I DO.

YEAH, ME TOO.

OKAY I HAVE A NEW IDEA.

IF YOU [illegible] ESCAPE BY PUTTING FISH IN OUR MOUTHS SO WE CAN BREATHE WHILE UNDER-WATER --

-- AGAIN --

-- I WILL [illegible]JA-PUNCH YOU SO HARDCORE IT WILL KNOCK YOU OUT. AND WHEN YOU WAKE UP? THE FORCE OF IT WILL KNOCK YOU OUT A SECOND TIME.

BEFORE YOU WAKE UP.

NO, THIEF

GOOD

NOT OUR MOUTHS.

AH, THE PERFECT DISGUISE

HEY THE NEW GJY KILLED SUH'ZAHNE AND NOW HE'S WEARING HIS FACE

LIKE WE WOULDN'T RECOGNIZE IT?

TSK, WHAT A POORLY CONCEVED DISGUISE!

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WHAT? NO I DIDN'T KILL ANYONE TO ACQUIRE A FACE TO USE AS A MASK.

SHEER GENIUS THOUGH THAT ACT WOULD BE.

THE TRUTH, BY WHICH I MEAN NOT A SERIES OF LIES IS.

HE, UH STEPPED OUT

STEPPED OUT?!

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA?

YEAH. SAID HE NEEDED A SMOKE BREAK?

OH WELL.

YOU KNOW HOW SMOKERS GET ABOUT THEIR SMOKIN'

JUST PUFF PUFF PUFF WITH THEM.

BUT THAT DOESN'T EXPLAIN WHY YOU LOOK JUST LIKE HIM.

OR HOW YOUR LARVA MATURED IN ABOUT THREE MINUTES INSTEAD OF SEVEN WEEKS

OR WHY YOU SOUND WRONG

OH, THAT

I'M PROBABLY YOUR NEWEST RULING CLASS LARVAL HEAD SQUID THING.

NEW LEADER?

BUT WE HAVE ONE

Y'KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS?

GLORIOUS LEADER, WE HAVE FOUND A QUEEN FOR YOU!

I HAVE MADE A GRAVE MISCALCULATION HERE

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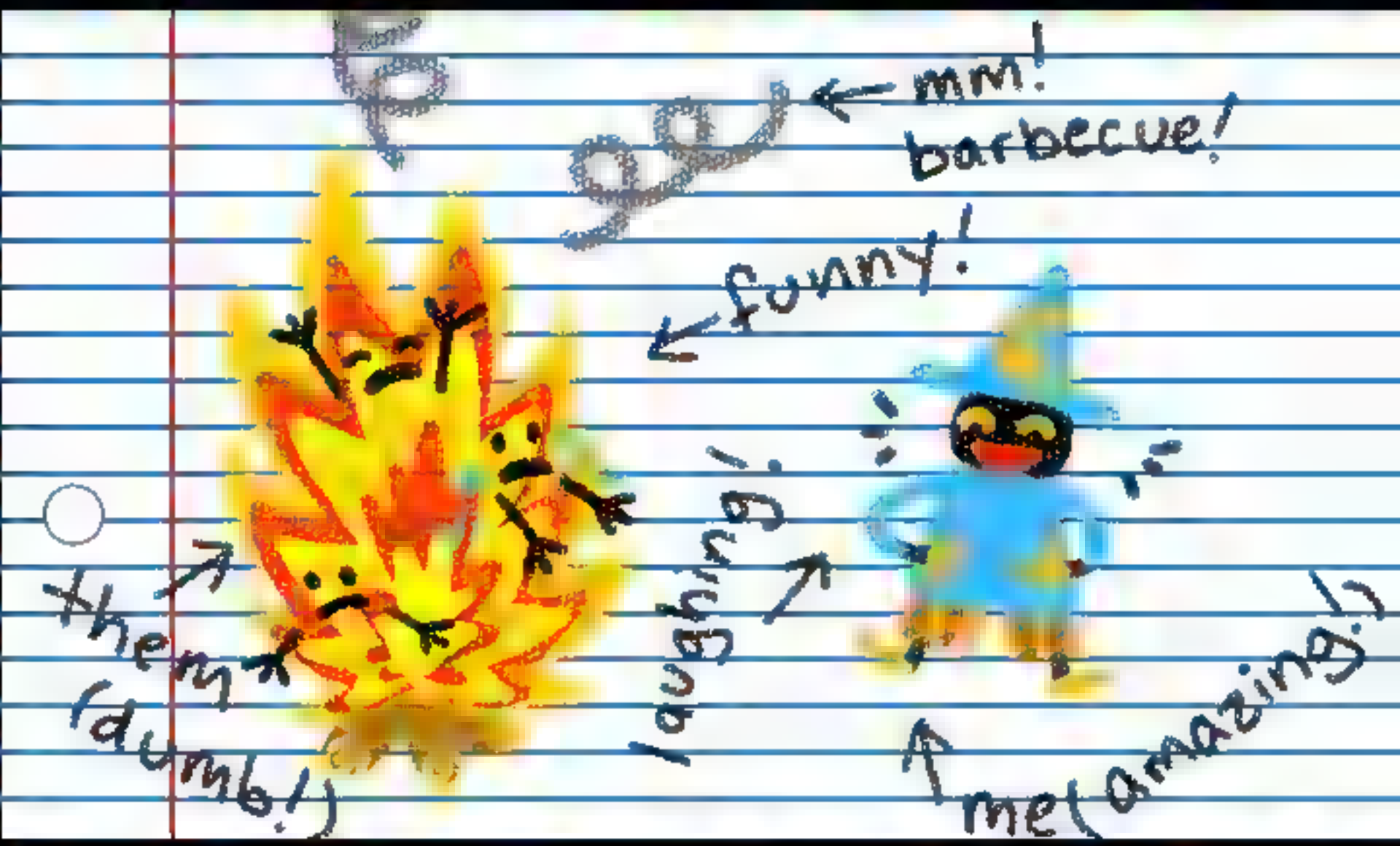
HEY, GUYS.

SO YOU ARE AN INCEST DEMON

EVERYTHING MAKES SO MUCH SENSE NOW.

NO, IT'S A CUNNING DISGUISE!

WHICH YOU ADOPTED AS PART OF YOUR MORE CUNNING RESCUE PLAN!



YES. THE ESCAPE PLAN.

MY QUEEN YOJ SHOULDN'T PLAY WITH THE FOOD.

WHAT DID HE SAY?

NOTHING OF CONSEQUENCE

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WHY DID THE CULTIST REFER TO US AS FOOD?

OH, DON'T BE SILLY

HE COULD'VE BEEN REFERRING TO ANY *NUMBER* OF PEOPLE TO BE EATEN WHO *AREN'T* YOU.

AND HE CALLED YOU HIS QUEEN.

NOW THAT'S RIDICULOUS.

I'M ONLY *BETROTHED* TO THEIR KING.

OH, LORD

HEY! SOMETIMES A GUY JUST NEEDS TO FEEL PRETTY, *OKAY?*

BLACK MAGE, I BOTH SUPPORT AND ENDORSE YOUR DECISION.

SO YOU'LL FREE US.

WITH, Y'KNOW ROYAL AUTHORITY AND SUCH.

OH, YEAH, I'LL GET RIGHT ON THAT

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GREETINGS MY QUEEN

TONS OF GREETINGS.

ARE YOU ANTIC PATING OUR UNION AS MUCH AS I?

LET ME ANSWER THAT BY GLAZING OVER IT

HEY, NOT THAT I CARE ABOUT THEM OR ANYTHING, BUT DO WE REALLY HAVE TO EAT THOSE LIGHT WARRIORS?

THEY AREN'T FOR US.

THEY'RE FOR UR

WE'LL KILL THEM IN THE SUMMONING CIRCLE, THEN WE'LL FORCE THEIR SPIRITS THROUGH SEVEN DIMENSIONS OF ENDLESS PAIN SO THAT THEY MAY BE DEVOURED BY OUR DREAD [illegible]

OH!

WELL, THAT'S FINE THEN.

JUST DIDN'T WANT TO HAVE TO EAT THAT GREASY FOREIGN ELF

THUS FUELED BY OUR SACRIFICE, UR WILL BE BROUGHT INTO OUR WORLD TO USHER IN AN AGE OF ETERNAL TORMENT!

WE'LL BE THE ENVY OF ALL THE OTHER CRAZY DOOM CULTS

MAYBE EVEN SWEEP THE COVETED [illegible]

WE'VE NEVER HAD A DOOMSIES CEREMONY BEFORE, WHAT WITH THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF LIFE AND HAPPINES

GREAT LET'S AT LEAST WOUND THE LIGHT WARRIORS WHILE WE CAN.

THEY HAVE A WAY OF GETTING OUT OF CRAP LIKE THIS.

HMM.

AWKWARD

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YARGH!

WHAT IS THAT?

SOUNDS LIKE IT'S COMING FROM THEIR MAKESHIFT MINI-SHRINE IN THE CENTER

AH! MY EYES! WHAT DID YOJ DO WITH MY EYES!

GKLE CHOKIN' ON INTESINES GHRK

AH, IT'S BLACK MAGE.

HE MUST BE IN UR BASE, KILLING ALL UR DUDES.

THAT'S IT. I'M GOING TO GO SPEAK WITH THE BLOODIED, SCREAMING, KNIFE-WIELDING MANIAC.

I TOO FEEL THIS WAY

MAKE SURE YOU TELL BLACK MAGE TO LOOK OUT FOR THAT GUY

HE SOUNDS DANGEROUS.

SORRY ABOUT THE MESS.

FORGOT HOW MUCH THESE GUYS BLEED

SO THEY SAW RIGHT THROUGH YOUR DISGUISE

MAYBE IF YOU'D SHUT YOUR AIR-HOLE OCCASIONALLY, YOU MIGHT PICK UP SOME POINTERS FROM ME IN THE TWIN ARTS OF SUBTERFUGE AND WANTONITY.

LIKE A WINDOW

SO THEY SAW RIGHT THROUGH YOUR DISGUISE

WHERE'S THE SEA FIEND? WHERE'S THE ORB OF WATER?

THE DESCRIPTION FOR THIS QUEST HAS BEEN *FRUSTRATINGLY* VAGUE.

THERE'S NO QUEST HERE

JUST PERVERTS WITH DEAD GODS GROWING OUT OF THEIR NECKS.

AND THEIR SECRET FORMULA FOR THE END OF THE WORLD

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FORMULA FOR THE END OF THE WORLD?

WHAT'S IT SAY?

THAT WAS HARDLY APPROPRIATE BEHAV-

KRA-

WELL?

IT SAYS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THINGS.

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LOOK, I'LL LEVEL WITH YOU.

IT WAS ~~OUR~~ THEIR PLAN TO KILL YOU GUYS IN THIS SUMMONING CIRCLE.

WHAT SUMMONING CIRCLE?

WELL, YOU CAN'T SEE IT UNDER THE ENTRAILS AND GORE, BUT WE'RE STANDING IN A SUMMONING CIRCLE WHICH IS ACTUALLY A SQUARE, DON'T ASK.

ANYWAY.

I GUESS THEY'D THEN INVOKE THE TRUE NAME OF UR, WRITTEN HERE, AND THAT WOULD SEND YOUR SOULS THROUGH, LET'S JUST SAY IT'S A PLACE WHERE NOTHING GOOD EVER HAPPENS.

AND AT THE END, YOUR SPIRITS BECOME THE FUEL THAT BRINGS UR INTO OUR WORLD, THE END OF EVERYTHING

PROBABLY FOREVER.

MAYBE YOU SHOULDN'T BE THE ONE HOLDING THE KEYS TO THE APOCALYPSE.

I'M OFFENDED THAT YOU THINK SO LITTLE OF ME.

PLUS I CAN'T PRONOUNCE IT

IS THAT A ***Q***?

I THINK IT'S A ***W***.

NO, ***THAT'S*** A W

THAT'S A ***SEVEN***

THAT MAKES NO SENSE.

WHAT'RE YOU GUYS DOIN'?

JUST SKIRTING THE ENDTIMES.

CAN I PLAY?

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BUH, ZOOK?

WHAT INSANITY SCROLL ARE *YOU* READING? THAT'S A "KGQ" SOUND

YOU'RE FORGETTING THE SEVEN

SHUT UP ABOUT THIS SEVEN OF YOURS! THERE'S NO SEVEN!

WELL, I'VE SWITCHED MY STATS EVERY WAY I CAN THINK OF AT THIS THING, AND IT'S DONE NOTHING AT ALL

THERE'S A SMOCKER

WE HAVE TO ACCEPT THERE'S NO DECIPHERING THIS SCROLL AND WE'LL NEVER FIGURE OUT UR'S TRUE NAME

X'KZLPYG!

DON'T YOU KNOW YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO SAY "BLESS YOU" WHEN SOMEONE SNEEZES?

SO THAT WAS A SNEEZE AND *NOT* ONE OF YOUR PATENTED PIERCING INSIGHTS?

THEY *ARE* SIMILAR

BUT I *WAS* THINKING ALL THOSE CULTISTS HAD GIRL NAMES, SO MAYBE UR DOES TOO.

LIKE UR'SUHLA?

OR JNN'EFUR

REALLY-SOUNDING AND RUMBLE NOISES!

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YOU JUST *HAD* TO KEEP READING THE SCROLL OF DOOM.

YOU WERE *HELPING!*

IT *WAS* YOUR IDEA.

YOU WERE HELPING EVEN BEFORE H.M!

DON'T WORRY, BLACK MAGE.

I DON'T BLAME YOU FOR THIS.

I'M JUST SAYING THAT TO BE NICE TO THE POOR GUY

YOU'RE THE ONE WHO DID IT!

WE CAN SHIFT BLAME TO ANYONE WE WANT, ESPECIALLY BLACK MAGE, LATER.

RIGHT NOW, WE NEED A PLAN.

NYEH NYEH NYEH, MYEH MYEH *MYEH* NYEH? NYEH

MYEH MYEH MYEH *MYEH*

SINCE THINGS CAN'T POSSIBLY GET ANY WORSE, RED MAGE, WE TURN TO YOU.

PREPARE TO BE PROVED WRONG!

WHEN DEALING WITH ENTITIES FROM BEYOND TIME AND SPACE, THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO *NEVER READ ANY-THING.*

WOW I REALLY SHOULD'VE THOUGHT OF THAT LIKE TEN MINUTES AGO.

OKAY, WHAT'S THE SECOND MOST IMPORTANT THING?

NEVER LOOK AT ANY-THING.

AND THAT WOULD BE WHY

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OKAY, THERE'S NO REASON TO PANIC.

THERE'S *NOT*?

IT IS MOST LIKELY THAT UR HERE COULD, AND INDEED *WILL*, KILL US A THOUSAND TIMES IN WAYS OUR MORTAL BODIES WON'T QUITE PROCESS.

SO IT *MIGHT* BE RELATIVELY PAINLESS.

THAT'S NOT COMFORTING. LIKE, AT ALL

NO? THAT'S PROBABLY BECAUSE I HAVEN'T MENTIONED THE OTHER THINGS. BY COMPARISON, IT'S VERY NICE

OTHER THINGS?

OH, YES. AS AN ELDER BEING, THERE'S A WHOLE LIST OF UNSPEAKABLE HORRORS IT'LL PERPETRATE AGAINST US. THE MERE FACT THAT WE STILL HAVE SKIN IS FAIRLY POSITIVE.

OKAY, SERIOUSLY, RED MAGE? ENOUGH ALREADY

WELL. I WAS ABOUT TO DIVULGE ITS ONE WEAKNESS, BUT OKAY.

FINE. FINE GO AND DIVULGE

THANK YOU.

ALL THE TENTACLES IMPLY THAT *UR* IS YOUR BASIC KRAKENOID *ERGO*

I WAS WRONG. OH YE GODS, HOW I WAS WRONG! A *THOUSAND* AGONIES WOULD BE A REPRIEVE AT THIS POINT! WHY WON'T IT LET ME *DIE*?! HOW IS IT PUSHING MY SKELETON THROUGH MY MOUGHK

HUH.

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WELL. I'M RUNNING AWAY

LIKE A RACE?

SURE.

HEY! NO FAIR!

KNIFE SHLOWSH DOWN DA FEETSH.

I'M GONNA WIN. I'M GONNA WIN!

SHUNCH!

LOUSY NON-EUCLIDIAN TEMPLE.

SYRUNCH!

YOU DROPPED YOUR KNIFE BACK THERE. IN MY SKULL. AGAIN.

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THE HITS KEEP ON COMING I'M STUCK.

HOW?

IT'S A LUMP OF OCTOPUS GOD

TAKE A GUESS!

AH.

SO YOU'RE STUCK METAPHYSICALLY, THEN.

FIGHTER. YES. I'M STUCK METAPHYSICALLY MORON

THERE ARE NO EASY SOLUTIONS, BUT IT MAY HELP YOU TO THINK ABOUT THE POSSIBLE ROOT OF THIS PROBLEM.

HE'S GOT SUCKERS!

IT'S LIKE BEING KISSED BY A HUNDRED LEECHES.

SO IT'S TROUBLE WITH INTIMACY.

HEY, LET'S JUST KEEP WASTING TIME. IT'S NOT LIKE MY FACE IS BEING DIGESTED

THAT OFTEN STEMS FROM AN INABILITY TO TRUST OTHERS. MAYBE THAT'S WHAT'S GOT YOU FEELING "STUCK"

YOU'RE RIGHT

IT'S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH THE MONSTER MADE OF SNOT AND RUBBER THAT I'M STUCK TO.

OH, I SEE

SO WHEN DID YOU FIRST REALIZE YOU HAD THIS DRINKING PROBLEM?

ARE YOU CRYING?

YES.

SO THEN WE'RE HAVING A BREAKTHROUGH. TERRIFIC!

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I KNOW HOW TO RELEASE YOU!

IT'S MORE IDIOTIC THERAPY, ISN'T IT.

NO. IT'S *BETTER* THAN THERAPY!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING? THAT SOUNDED LIKE A SWORD WHAT'S HAPPENING? I CAN'T SEE BACK THERE

DON'T WORRY, BLACK MAGE.

THIS'LL BE QUICK AND PAINLESS.

PROBABLY

LET'S TRY SOMETHING ELSE.

LIKE *ANYTHING* ELSE

NAW, THIS'LL BE GREAT

YOU'LL LOVE IT

OH, I DOUBT THAT VERY MUCH!

OKAY HOW ABOUT THIS...

ANYTHING!

I'LL DO IT WITH MY EYES CLOSED TO *REALLY* IMPRESS YOU!

THAT'S FUNNY

RIGHT?

I CAN'T HEAR YOU! I'M GETTING READY FOR A RUNNING START!

NO! STOP!

NOW I CAN'T HEAR YOU BECAUSE I'M RUNNING AS FAST AS I CAN.

WHY?

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SO WE STABBED IT, WE SLICED IT, AND WE RAN FROM IT.

WHAT ELSE *CAN* WE DO?

I'VE GOT DOOM SPELLS.

THE ONLY QUESTION IS WHICH DOOM SPELL SHOULD I USE?

LEAVE IT TO RED MAGE TO GET DEVOURED BEFORE DIVULGING A *KRAKENOID'S* WEAKNESS.

KRAKANOID

IT'S ALL SO CLEAR TO ME NOW

512K
Joystick-chucks Required

BLACK MAGE.

I KNOW WHAT IT IS WE MUST DO.

IT'LL REQUIRE BALLS.

UH.. ?

AND *BRICKS*. WE WILL NEED BALLS AND BRICKS.

LET'S *NOT* COMBINE THOSE.

HEY

THIEF!

THIEF! WHERE IN THE CK HAVE YOU BEEN?

Y'KNOW AROUND.

WHILE YOU'VE BEEN GOOFING OFF, ME AND FIGHTER -- BUT MOSTLY ME -- HAVE BEEN DEFEATING THE CRAP OUT OF UR

IS THAT WHY HE'S LYING THERE LIKE A LUMP?

MAYBE HE GOT A TUMMY ACHE FROM RED MAGE.

HE'S A DREAD GOO OF ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION! HE DOESN'T GET TUMMY ACHES! AND HE'S NOT JUST LYING THERE EITHER.

HE'S RECOILING FROM MY DEVASTATING ATTACKS.

WAS THAT BEFORE OR AFTER YOUR CLOTHES CAME OFF?

YOU, YOU SAW THAT?

I HAD A GOOD, WHICH IS TO SAY TERRIBLE, VIEW WHILE I WAS UP IN THE RAFTERS "ACQUIRING" THE WATER ORB TA-DA!

AH. OF COURSE.

EXACTLY WHERE I SAID IT WOULD BE AS SOON AS WE ARRIVED

TECHNICALLY IT WAS MORE LIKE

AND HERE ARE THE KEYS

BAH! IT SMELLS STICKY IN HERE! LET'S GO HOME.

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SO. WE'RE DONE HERE, RIGHT?

WHAT ABOUT RED MAGE AND WHAT ABOUT A *FIEND*!

WHAT *ABOUT* THEM? THE RED MAGE PROBLEM IS SOLVED, AND THE FIEND IS CLEARLY TAKEN CARE OF

LOOK AT HIM SITTING THERE QUIVERING THIS IS VICTORY

GRAUGH!

UR THIRSTS FOR OUR BLOOD! GIVE UP ALL HOPE!

YIELD TO HIS HUNGER AND SERVE THE ETERNAL ALIEN GODS!

NOTHING CAN OPPOSE THE OBLIVION THAT IS UR!

IT'S GOT THIEF!

GOOD!

NO.

I DON'T THINK SO.

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FIGHTER, STAND BACK PLEASE.

BUT YOU'RE GETTIN' EATEN.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT

TOSS!

WOW THAT WAS EASY

THAT'S BECAUSE..

CRASH

.WHEN SOMETHING IS THROWN AWAY, IT STAYS GONE FOREVER.

GOOD I WAS WORRIED THERE FOR A SECOND

THEY HAVE ECLIPSES *UNDERWATER* NOW?

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SPOING!

AUGH!

WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

I'M DEFEATING UR!

SON OF A--!

BY BOUNCING HIM AROUND?

BRICKS AND BALLS, THIEF

IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO BE SURE.

PUNK!

OH YE GODS. THE AGONY!

THIS WOULD BE UNFORTUNATE IF IT WAS HAPPENING TO SOMEONE ELSE.

THE WALLS PROVIDE THE BRICKS AND I'M BOUNCING UR AROUND LIKE A BALL.

I GUESS THAT MAKES A KIND OF SENSE

PLEASE PUT ME DOWN.

SURE THING, BLACK MAGE!

THANK YOU.

FWACK!

SPAW!

JUST AS SOON AS WE WIN!

BUH?

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WAM!

I THINK YOU'VE HURT BLACK MAGE ENOUGH, FOR NOW.

WHADDYA MEAN? HE'S DOIN' GREAT!

I PRAY FOR A DEATH THAT WILL NOT COME.

BE THAT AS IT MAY, YOU'RE STILL WRECKIN' THE PLACE.

THERE'S AN OCEAN RIGHT OUTSIDE THESE WALLS.

I WILL LEAVE THE INEVITABLE CONCLUSION TO YOUR IMAGINATION.

IMAGINATION
IMAGINATION
IMAGINATION
IMAGINATION
IMAGINATION

GIVE ME A PING, THIEF!!. ONE PING ONLY, PLEASE.

AYE CAPTAIN.

JUST PUT BLACK MAGE DOWN.

I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER WHY I WAS HOLDING ON TO HIM.

OH, THANK THE DARK GODS FOR THIS.

MAYBE I WAS TRYING TO STOP THAT FROM HAPPENING.

GET ME OUTTA HERE!

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DID YOU HEAR SOMETHING?

SOUNDED LIKE "GET MIATA'S EAR." MAYBE IT'S A QUEST?

MIATA?

IS THAT A DUDE OR A MONSTER?

COULD BE A *SAMURAI* MONSTER.

HADN'T THOUGHT OF THAT.

MONSTER SAMURAI ARE *TERRIBLE*

SOME OF THEM, I DON'T THINK THEY KNOW HOW TO *USE* SWORDS.

SPLOT!

I COULD HAVE LIVED MY WHOLE LONG LIFE WITHOUT *THAT*

OH, MAN. WHAT A **SMELL** IN THAT THING. HORRIBLE.

ANYWAY! YOU GUYS ORDERED AN APOCALYPSE, IF I'M RIGHT.

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WHAT JUST HAPPENED HERE?

I SUPPOSE YOU HAVE A BETTER WAY TO TRANSPORT SHARDS OF YOUR BEING ACROSS REALITIES SO YOUR FULL GLORY DOESN'T DESTROY THEM BEFORE PAYMENT?

SHARD'S DESTROYING WHAT NOW?

THAT'S FASCINATING. SHUT IT

YOU'RE GOING TO HEAR A LOT OF **CRAZY** TALK FROM THESE GUYS ABOUT STOPPING YOU.

I GET THAT ALL THE TIME.

THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT **I** SUMMONED YOU, AND YOUR APOCALYPSE WILL START WITH **THOSE** JERKS.

HIYA!

I USUALLY START THESE THINGS BY BOILING THE ATMOSPHERE INTO SPACE, BUT YOU'RE THE BOSS.

YES. I **AM** THE BOSS.

BLACK MAGE IS MAKING FRIENDS!

THAT'S... NOT HOW I'D PUT IT.

LET'S GET SOME DOOM UP INS.

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WATCH WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DISSOLVE ALL THE ELECTRONS FROM A BODY OF SOLID MATTER.

SHRRRRIP!

OH, MAN, DID IT EVER STINK IN THERE

RED MAGE, YOU'RE ALIVE!

OBVIOUSLY

BUT WE HEARD YOU DIE.

IT...IT WAS WONDERFUL.

OH, THAT. I LOST MY PENCIL IN THE MONSTER GOO, SO I NEVER GOT TO WRITE DOWN WHAT THE DAMAGE WAS.

IT *REMOVED* YOUR ENTIRE SKELETON, RM.

[illegible], SKELETONS ARE WHOLLY VESTIGIAL. EVERYONE KNOWS THAT.

THAT'S HOW SCIENCE WORKS!

WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?

YOU ANSWERED YOUR OWN QUESTION, PAL.

YOU SAVED OUR TOWN, WHITE MAGE!

HUZZAH TO THE WHITE MAGE!

HOW CAN WE REPAY YOU?

PLEASE, YOUR THANKS ARE MORE THAN ENOUGH. IT IS MY PLEASURE TO ASSIST THOSE IN NEED.

EVERYTHING IS GOOD AND IT WILL BE THAT WAY FOREVER!

WE LOVE YOU, WHITE MAGE!

ONE MINUTE AGO .

NOTHING BAD CAN HAPPEN WHEN YOU RAISE A TEMPLE FROM THE OCEAN.

SO LET'S TURN ON THAT CONVENIENTLY BUTTON OPERATED ANCIENT STEAM-POWERED BILGE PUMP AND GET OUT OF HERE ALREADY

YEAH, THIS IS GREAT THIS IS *SUPER* GREAT

I'D *MUCH* RATHER BE STRANDED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE OCEAN THAN BE NEAR A SHORE

ARE YOU SURE?

TO BE FAIR, THAT SHORE *WOULD* HAVE BEEN NEAR ONRAC, AND THAT TOWN *WAS* A HOLE.

OKAY, *ADMITTEDLY*, THIS WHOLE DEATH ON THE HIGH SEAS *THING* IS REALLY A LATERAL MOVE.

BUT WE COULD'VE *LEFT* ONRAC.

OR AT LEAST BURNED IT TO THE GROUND SO IT WOULDN'T BOTHER ANYONE EVER AGAIN.

BUT THIS?

THIS IS THE *OCEAN*. YOU CAN'T BURN DOWN THE OCEAN TO GET AWAY FROM IT.

I MEAN, JUST LOOK AT HOW HOPELESS THIS IS.

DEAD BODIES AND SUNKEN HOUSES ALL OVER THE PLACE!

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OH, LIGHT WARRIORS, YOU SURVIVED THE FLOOD!

IT'S HORRIBLE! ONRAC WAS WIPED OFF THE MAP BY A TREMENDOUS WAVE.

WHAT A TERRIBLE WASTE OF PERFECTLY GOOD WATER.

THESE PEOPLE HAVE SUFFERED SO MUCH!

IF ONLY WE COULD MAKE THE FLOOD WATER RECEDE!

WISH WE COULD HELP, BUT WE'VE GOT TO GET THIS ORB OF WATER BACK TO SARDA.

THE ORB! WE CAN SAVE ONRAC WITH THAT!

AGAIN!

WOULDN'T IT BE *EASIER* TO JUST LET THEM BE DEAD?

YOU FOOL! HELP WHITE MAGE TO GET ON HER GOOD SIDE.

AND THEN THE NEEDLESSLY VIOLENT SEX!

DUDE, WHAT? I'M THE HIDEOUSLY EVIL [illegible]

THE DISTINCTION BLURS A LITTLE MORE EVERY DAY.

HE'S SPACING OUT AGAIN.

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OKAY, SO WE ARE AGREED

WE HELP WHITE MAGE DO WHATEVER STUPID THING SHE'S TALKING ABOUT...

...FOR THE EXPRESS PURPOSE OF GETTING INTO HER BOOTS.

AND THEN WE'LL DO SOMETHING AWFUL TO MAKE IT UP TO OUR DARK LORDS LATER.

LIKE KICK A PUPPY.

MAN, ARE YOU EVEN TRYING ANY MORE?

HEY, YOU THINK IT'S EASY TO COME UP WITH NEW VILLAINY FOR YOU TO DO?

WE'RE QUITE LITERALLY ***RUNNING OUT OF EVIL***

GET BACK IN THE GAME, GUYS. THE MOUTH-BREATHERS ARE STARING AT US AGAIN!

WITH THE ORB OF WATER'S INFLUENCE, WE CAN END THE FLOOD AND STILL SAVE SOME PEOPLE!

YES!

THIS IS A THING WE MUST DO. WE WILL GET RIGHT ON IT.

FLOOD

DAMMIT, SHE'LL THINK I WAS BEING SARCASTIC. I WAS SINCERE!

SO PRETENDING TO BE SOMETHING YOU'RE NOT IS SINCERE?

UNLESS THERE'S ANOTHER, ***STUPIDER*** DEFINITION WITH WHICH I AM UNFAMILIAR

THIS IS FASCINATING, SHUT UP.

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OKAY, OKAY **ORB** ME.

I'M STARTING TO QUESTION WHY WE'RE DOING THIS.

QUESTION?

QUESTION. **YOU** WOULD QUESTION THE WISDOM OF THE OMNIPOTENT WIZARD WHO'S **TECHNICALLY** OLDER THAN THE UNIVERSE?

BECAUSE **I** DON'T QUESTION **YOU** ABOUT BEING FOUR LACK-WITTED BUNGLERS.

SO MAYBE YOU SHOULD **SHUT IT** WHEN IT COMES TO MATTERS THAT'RE BEYOND YOUR MEAGER SCOPE OF LIMITED UNDERSTANDING.

MAYBE WE WILL!

GOOD

FINE. TAKE IT

USELESS UPPITY KIDS

SO. SHOULD WE DO **LUNCH** OR...?

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NOW I NEED YOU TO GET THE ORB OF AIR.

OH SURE. THE ORB OF AIR, AND AFTER THAT MAYBE WE'LL GET THE ORB OF HEAD-LIGHT FLUID

DO YOU THINK WE WERE BORN YESTERDAY?

WITH THE SCOPE OF MY LIFE, AND MY NON-LINEAR VIEW OF TIME, I CAN'T BE SURE YOU'RE EVEN BORN *YET*

I'VE BEEN BORN, SARDA.

THANK YOU, FIGHTER.

AND THEN THE ORB OF ELBOW GREASE TOO, RIGHT?

YEAH, YOU DID THAT JOKE ALREADY. WE'RE MOVING ON.

I JUST WANT TO MAKE SURE EVERYONE KNOWS HOW MUCH DERISION I HOLD FOR THIS QUEST

BECAUSE IT'S STUPID

I THINK WE GET IT

MAY I REQUEST SOME LUNCH BEFORE WE BEGIN ANOTHER OF THESE ARDUOUS JOURNEYS?

I CAN'T REMEMBER THE LAST TIME WE ATE.

YEAH, I DON'T HAVE ANY-THING BETTER TO DO. NOT ME, *NO* THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I GOT INTO WIZARDING TO DO.

WHY SHOULDN'T I WASTE TIME MAKING FOOD FOR A BAND OF CLOWNS, HM?

I BET IT'D BE FUN. LIKE SAWING ALL MY FINGERS OFF.

I HOPE IT'S SANDWICHES.

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MMM! SAMMICHES!

WHO WOULD'VE THOUGHT THAT SARDA HAD A USE?

THOUGH I AM *LOATHE* TO ADMIT IT, THESE ARE GOOD.

AREN'T YOU GUYS GLAD I'M HERE?

NONE OF YOU WOULD HAVE HAD THE *BOLDNESS* OF CHARACTER OR CLARITY OF ACTION TO BEG FOR FOOD.

YOU'D HAVE STARVED TO DEATH. THIS, THEREFORE, COUNTS AS CREATING AND ENACTING A PLAN TO SAVE THE LIVES OF PARTY MEMBERS THROUGH NON-VIOLENT MEANS. EXTRA XP!

SHUT IT

WHAT'S IN THESE SAMMICHES ANYWAY, MISTER SARDA?

OH TELEPORTING TURKEY

NEVER HEARD OF THAT BEF

ORE...?

THAT'S BECAUSE I JUST MADE THEM.

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I CAN SCARCELY BELIEVE IT, BUT I'M DONE. AFTER A LIFETIME, I'M DONE.

I HAVE TRANSLATED THE LEFEINISH LANGUAGE. AND IT'S ALL THANKS TO YOU BRAVE SOULS.

WELL, WE CAN'T TAKE ALL THE CREDIT OR UNNE.

ALL WE DID WAS FALL THROUGH A BLACK HOLE AND OVERCOME THIRTEEN TRIALS OF FORBIDDEN WISDOM.

THUS UNLOCKING THE ***CYPHERSTONE*** THAT CONTAINS THE FORMULA TO UNDERSTAND ALL LANGUAGES.

ANY BAND OF ADVENTURERS WOULD'VE DONE THE SAME.

THE ANCIENT SECRETS OF THE FANTASTIC LEFEINISH PEOPLE ARE NOW AN OPEN BOOK!

YOU FACED IMPOSSIBLE HORRORS TO BRING THE CYPHERSTONE BACK. YOUR DEEDS MADE THIS POSSIBLE. YOUR BRAVERY SHALL BE REMEMBERED FOR-EVER.

ARGH, ORDINARY FIRE!

THE ONLY THING THAT INSTANTLY DESTROYS CYPHERSTONES, NOTES, AND MY HUMAN FLESH!

I'M NOT SURE THAT WE DID THE RIGHT THING.

HEY DID YOU WANT TO SIT AROUND ALL DAY WHILE PEOPLE YELLED AT US ABOUT DESTROYING THE HOUSE WE LANDED IN? ***HMM?***

TRUST ME. THIS IS WHY THEY INVENTED ARSON.

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WEL.., NOW WHAT?

WE NEED TO COLLECT THE AIR ORB.

OKAY

DO WE KNOW WHERE IT IS?

NO.

DO WE KNOW WHO HAS IT?

NO.

OKAY

DO WE KNOW WHAT IT *LOOKS* LIKE?

OOH, *PROBABLY* AN ORB. ONE WITH AIR.

THAT'S SUPER.

WAIT, HE MAY HAVE *SOMETHING* THERE!

YEAH, A LEARNING DISORDER.

DAMN, THAT'S GOLD.

ALL WE NEED IS A GLASS BLOWER, AND ALL THE EQUIPMENT FOR GLASS BLOWING, AND WHATEVER ETHER IT IS THEY BLOW GLASS OUT OF.

LET ME JUST STOP YOU RIGHT THERE BEFORE I AM HONOR BOUND TO CUT YOUR FACE LIKE AN ELVEN WHORE

HOLD IT. *ELVEN WHORE?* DO I EVEN HAVE TO TELL YOU WHY THAT'S SO OFFENSIVE TO ME?

BLAH BLAH BLAH *GLASS BLOWER,* BLAH BLAH BLAH.

LOOK, IF YOUR MOTHER HAD MADE DRESSES, I WOULD'VE CALLED HER A TAILOR INSTEAD.

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IF ANYONE WOULD KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE ORB OF AIR, IT'D BE THE PIONEERS OF AIRSHIP DESIGN.

YEAH, HEY, THAT'S A GREAT IDEA, RM!

WE'LL GO TO LEFEIN.

WE'LL FIND OUT EVERYTHING WE NEED TO KNOW AT THE PLACE WHERE EVERYONE SPEAKS A COMPLETELY INCOMPREHENSIBLE LANGUAGE.

THEN IT'S SETTLED! TO LEFEIN!

SARCASM, RED MAGE. WE'VE TALKED ABOUT IT BEFORE.

YOUR POINT?

THEY PROBABLY JUST FAKE THAT LANGAUGE BARRIER TO KEEP THEIR MONOPOLY ON AIR-SHIP SALES.

REALLY? 'CAUSE I WAS ALWAYS TAUGHT THIS LEGEND ABOUT HOW THE LEFEINISH PEOPLE WERE THE FIRST GREAT KINGDOM OF MAN.

THEIR TECHNOLOGY FAR OUT-PACED THAT OF THE STAGNANT BUT HEGEMONIC ELVEN NATION, WHICH, OUT OF FEAR, CAST ELDRITCH LINGUAVEX SPELLS UPON THEM, THEREFORE LOCKING THE WONDERS OF LEFEINISH TECHNOLOGY FOREVER.

THAT'S FUNNY

BECAUSE I WAS TAUGHT A SIMILAR BUT SUBTLY DIFFERENT LEGEND.

HUMANS DROOL, ELVES RULE.

MYTHS ARE A RICH TAPESTRY.

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AND HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO GET TO LEFEIN? IT'S ON ANOTHER CONTINENT.

LET'S HEAD BACK TO MELMOND AND VISIT THE TRAVEL AGENCY

OH, RIGHT THE ARSON.

EXCUSE ME, BUT I COULDN'T HELP OVERHEARING YOUR CONVERSATION.

I MAY HAVE *EXACTLY* WHAT IT IS YOU NEED.

WAIT A SECOND

YOU'RE THAT *JERK* AKBAR.

THE ONE WHO SELLS CRAP THAT NEVER *EVER* WORKS.

NO, THAT SOUNDS LIKE SOMEONE ELSE.

JUST LOOK AT MY SIGN.

NOT AKBAR'S DISCOUNT VACATION GETAWAYS

AS YOU CAN SEE, IT *CLEARLY* STATES THAT I AM *NOT* AKBAR.

HOW STUPID DO YOU

WE'LL TAKE FOUR PLEASE!

THAT'S GOOD.

I'M GLAD THAT HAPPENED. SO GLAD

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CAN YOU MAKE CHANGE FOR..ALL OF OUR MONEY?

LET ME JUST GO INTO MY OFFICE.

WITH AL... YOUR MONEY

YONG!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

RELAX. I'VE GOT A TON OF RANKS IN MY BARTERING SKIL... PROBABLY.

PROBABLY?

WEL... IT WAS THAT OR ANIMAL HUSBANDRY.

I ROLLED REALLY WEL... PROBABLY.

LOOK, IT DOESN'T MATTER, ANYWAY.

PROBABLY?

OH, I LET **NOT AKBAR** MAKE THE ROLL **FOR** ME SO MY KNOWLEDGE OF THE ROLL WOULDN'T COLOR MY PORTRAYAL OF ITS RESULT

HE TOLD ME WHAT I, AS THE **CHARACTER** RED MAGE, THOUGHT OF MY ABILITY TO BARTER BASED ON THE ROL...

IT'S A MORE PURE FORM OF ROLEPLAYING, YOU SEE.

NATURALLY

HE SAID I WAS **SO** CONFIDENT IN MY ABILITY TO GET THE BEST DEAL, THAT I SHOULD START THE BIDDING WITH EVERYTHING WE HAVE.

NOT AKBAR JUST RAN PAST ME IN THE WOODS CRYING TEARS OF JOY.

OH, HE'S JUST HAPPY TO MAKE CHANGE FOR US.

CREEEAK

FWUMP!

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MISTAKES WERE MADE. THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT WE DO NOT DWELL ON THE PAST, BUT MOVE *BRAVELY* INTO THE FUTURE.

HE'S NOT IN THE FOREST ANY-MORE.

HOW CAN YOU BE SURE?

BECAUSE I *LOOKED*.

IF HE *WAS* STILL IN THE FOREST, I'D KNOW IT, AND HE'D BE DEAD, AND I'D HAVE OUR MONEY BACK, AND THEN I'D COME HERE AND LIE ABOUT IT

SO HOW DO I KNOW THAT YOU'RE NOT LYING NOW?

HAVE FUN FIGURING THAT OUT

OOH, OOH, OOH! I CAN DO THIS *EASY*!

WHY? WHY HAVE YOU DONE THIS TO ME?

YOU TRIED TO *KILL* ME. A LOT AND OFTEN.

CLEARLY, I DIDN'T KILL YOU *ENOUGH*.

SEE, IT'S LIKE THAT PUZZLE WHERE THE *ONE* GUY SAYS HE ALWAYS LIES, AND THE *OTHER* GUY SAYS HE ALWAYS TELLS THE TRUTH.

SO YOU ASK ONE GUY DOESN'T MATTER WHICH, WHAT THE *OTHER* GUY HAD FOR LUNCH THAT DAY.

THEN YOU ASK THE *OTHER* GUY WHAT HE *DIDN'T* HAVE FOR LUNCH.

IF THEIR ANSWERS DIFFER, THEN YOU KNOW *ONE* TELLS THE TRUTH WHILE THE *OTHER ONE* LIES.

AND WHAT IF THEY SAY THE SAME THING?

THEN THE CONSPIRACY GOES *STRAIGHT* TO THE TOP

WHAT CONSPIRACY?

I WISH I KNEW, BM.

I WISH I KNEW.

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GENTLEMEN, BLACK MAGE, *MEET* THE ANSWER TO OUR PROBLEM!

GOOD OLD FASHIONED CAPITALISM!

JEFF'S BUDGET HOLIDAY TRAVEL

HELLO!

IT'S NOT IN COLOR *OR* AT THE RIGHT ANGLE.

WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?

THIS IS JEFF!

DO YOU NOT REMEMBER ME?

NO. I *COMPLETELY* FORGOT.

KICK!

HE SPOKE AND I KICKED HIM. I THOUGHT THAT WAS OUR "THING."

DID I DO WRONG?

NO.

NOT EVEN A LITTLE.

WAIT, WHAT?

I WASN'T LOOKING

DID I MISS SOMETHING?

YES!

BUH?

AGAIN!

OH, HI JEFF!

FWAP!

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YOU CAN'T STAB HIM.

ACTUALLY, I CAN. I TOTALLY CAN. I HAVE KNIVES AND HANDS AND EVERYTHING.

HE'S THE KEY TO COMPLETING OUR LATEST QUEST!

OR GETTING US TO WHERE WE CAN START IT

YOU HAVE NO *IDEA* THE DEGREE TO WHICH THAT IS *NOT* HELPING YOUR CAUSE *AT ALL.*

TELL ME, MR JEFF, HOW IS IT THAT YOUR SERVICES ARE SO AFFORDABLE?

FOLLOW ME INTO MY OFFICE, WHERE I CAN SHOW YOU!

OH, I HAVE TO SEE WHERE THIS GOES.

HIS OFFICE, I'M BETTING

WOW. YOUR BUSINESS IS SO LEGIT, IT DOESN'T HAVE TO LOOK REAL!

CREELIAK

I CALL IT THE REALLY VERY HUGE CANNON THAT COST EFFECTIVELY SHOOTS YOU PLACES.

IT'S MURDERIN' TIME.

FWUMP!

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THE THING THAT I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND IS HOW I GOT TALKED INTO DOING THIS.
NOT HYPNOVISION, I BET!
BUT THAT'S MY THING.
YES. OF COURSE IT IS.
GET IN THE CANNON, NOW.
WHAT'D YOU SAY BLACK MAGE? I'M WEARING MIRRORED SHADES FOR ABSOLUTELY NO REASON.
YOU'VE DONE THIS BEFORE, RIGHT?
OH, YES. MANY TIMES.
WITH CANNON BALLS.
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THE SECRET INGREDIENT IS EXPLOSIVES.

SO THAT WAS SAFE?

OH. QUITE POSSIBLY, YES.

THAT'S REASSURING, ME NEXT!

HOLD ON!

HOW CAN WE BE *SURE* BLACK MAGE SURVIVED?

SURVIVED?

WELL, UH. YOU DON'T KNOW THAT HE *DIDN'T* SURVIVE.

THAT PROVES HE'S OKAY, ME NEXT!

HOLD IT

I'LL NEED MORE PROOF THAN A LOGICAL FALLACY

OKAY

IN A RECENT POLL, IT WAS FOUND THAT 100% OF JEFFS WERE VERY HANDSOME AND THOUGHT THAT BLACK MAGE SURVIVED.

WHY DON'T YOU? IS IT BECAUSE YOU'RE UGLY?

THAT'S ENOUGH LOGICAL FALLACIES TO CONVINCE ME. BLACK MAGE IS FINE.

YAY, ME NEXT!

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HEY, IT DIDN'T WORK. WE WANT OUR MONEY BACK.

NO, IT WORKED GREAT THE SAFETY WAS JUST ON.

SAFETY?!

THE CANNON VERY CLEARLY WENT OFF!

I NEVER ***CLAIMED*** IT WAS A GOOD SAFETY, DID I?

I...

YOU...

THAT'S A DAMN FINE POINT

JUST TURN THE SAFETY OFF SO WE CAN GET TO LEFEIN ALREADY, OKAY?

OH, ***LEFEIN***?

YOU'LL WANT TO BE SHOT OUT OF THE CANNON THIS WAY SO THAT YOUR BODY REACHES ITS DESTINATION.

BODY?

A FIGURE OF SPEECH.

AS IN, "EVERY***BODY*** IS GOING TO BE FINE."

WHY IN THAT CONTEXT IT MAKES ***PERFECT*** SENSE!

SO WHERE WAS THAT THING AIMED A SECOND AGO?

SPIKE-FILLED-PIT FACTORY

"They gotta come from somewhere."

IT IS NOT IMPORTANT

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YOU KNOW? I'M NOT VERY ENTHUSED ABOUT GETTING IN THAT THING AGAIN.

BUT WHAT ABOUT OUR LIFE LONG DREAM?

OKAY WHICH ONE IS THIS?

WHERE DO YOU KEEP GETTING THOSE POSTERS?

AREN'T YOU GOING TO ASK HOW IT CAN BE OUR LIFELONG DREAM WHEN WE JUST MET RED MAGE AND THIEF?

SO YOU'RE ACTUALLY *AWARE* THAT THIS MAKES NO SENSE THEN?

YET WE CHASE OUR DREAMS ANY-WAY

EVERY DAY WITH YOU IS AN ADVENTURE I NEVER WANTED ..IKE SWIMMING NAKED THROUGH SHARDS OF GLASS

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Y'KNOW THIS SEEMED A LOT MORE REASONABLE ABOUT FIVE MINUTES AGO.

YES, YOU ARE RIGHT

I'M AIR-BORNE, I'M AIRBORNE!

THIS IS THE MOST AMAZING EXPERIENCE OF MY LIFE!

EXCEPT FOR ALL THOSE OTHER TIMES I WAS PAINFULLY HURLED INTO THE STRATO-SPHERE

WHY IS THIS MY LIFE?

UH. ?

EASY, SIR I'VE GOT YOU.

YOU'VE GOT ME? WHO'S GOT YOU?

I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW HURTING ME ANSWERS THE QUESTION.

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SO IT WORKED THIS TIME?

IT DEFINITELY MIGHT HAVE, YES.

YOU'RE THE PROFESSIONAL CANNONEER

SURE

LET'S LOAD UP FIGHTER THEN

SCORE!

HEY, THANKS FOR THE ASSIST I COULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN HERE WITHOUT YOUR HELP

YOU ARE A DEAD MAN

I ONLY WISH I COULD HEAR YOU OVER THESE ROARING MOUNTAIN WINDS. ANYWAY, THANKS!

SOON AS MY HEART STARTS PUMPING AGAIN DEAD MAN

THERE WE GO

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I BEEN HAVIN' ENOUGH O' THAT *SOFT-BELLY* GARLAND

MR. BIKKE, I DON'T BELIEVE THAT'S A HISTORICALLY ACCURATE PIRATE EXPRESSION.

Garland ✓
Silly Guy ✓
That kid what doesn't do the dishes ✓✓

YE BE ON THIN ICE AS IT BE, SONNY JIM.

MY *NAME* IS VILBERT

Silly Guy ✓
That kid what doesn't do the dishes "Vilbert" ✓✓✓

- IS THIS - GOING ANYWHERE? I HAVE SOME IMPORTANT *"NOT BEING IN THE SAME ROOM AS YOU"* TO GET DONE.

AYE, AYE I SAYS WE MUTINY ON HIM, I DO.

OKAY. BUT NEXT TIME - YOU SECRETLY PLOT TO OVERTHROW GARLAND, MAYBE YOU SHOULDN'T INVITE HIM TO THE MEETING.

HIYA.

HE BE *CATERIN'* THE MEETIN'

I MADE VEGETARIAN AND CHICKEN TACOS, SOFT *AND* HARDSHELL, NATURALLY.

DON'T BE SHY, THERE'S PLENTY TO GO AROUND!

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GARLAND, WHY ARE YOU HELPING BIKKE TO MUTINY AGAINST YOU?

THERE ARE TWO REASONS.

ONE: I WANTED TO TRY OUT A NEW RECIPE.

SEE, IT CALLED FOR LETTUCE.

BUT I'M A FIRM PROPONENT OF BABY SPINACH LEAVES.

- I FEEL - THEY CAN DELIVER A RICHNESS OF FLAVOR FAR IN EXCESS OF MERE LETTUCE WITHOUT SACRIFICING THE TACTILE EXPERIENCE IT -- BRINGS. :-

GARLAND!

HMM?

THE MUTINY?

OH, THAT.

IS THAT NOTHING WILL COME OF IT.

IS, TO PUT IT POLITELY, NOT SMART.

HE COULDN'T MUTINY WATER OUT OF A GLASS.

VILBERT IS A GOTH KID.

HE'S TOO BUSY TRYING TO LOOK LIKE HE STUMBLED INTO THAT AESTHETIC BY RAW FORCE OF COOLER-THAN-THOU TO DO ANYTHING.

AND YOU HAVE BEEN A BROKEN DARK ELF EVER SINCE FIGHTER TOOK YOUR SWORDS. :-

SO IN A HIGHLY-CALCULATED BALANCE OF POWER AND TREACHERY KIND OF WAY, I HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR.

BUT WHAT IF YOU'RE WRONG?

- ALL OF - THE TACOS CONTAIN AMNESIA PEPPERS. IN AN HOUR, THIS MEETING WILL HAVE NEVER ACTUALLY HAPPENED.

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OOF

AH, GOOD THING MY ARMOR BROKE MY FALL.

HEY, HOW DID YOU DO THAT?

HM? OH, I DOUBLE JUMPED AT THE LAST POSSIBLE SECOND

YOU CAN DO THAT?

APPARENTLY

HERE COMES RED MAGE. WONDER WHAT HE'LL DO.

IF HE'S SMART, HE'LL JUST MIME MY JUMP

YEAH. I WONDER WHAT HE'LL DO.

I WASN'T SURPRISED, WERE YOU SURPRISED, THIEF?

I'M SURPRISED WE CAN'T SEE MORE BONES.

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CAN YOU THROW HIT POINTS AT PEOPLE?

NO, BUT I *CAN* THROW PEOPLE TO HIT *POINTS*.

OKAY, THAT'LL BE OUR BACKUP. WE'LL CALL IT *PLAN: GOOD IDEA*.

ONLY THE BACKUP?

YES. I'M WORKING OUT THE DETAILS OF *PLAN: GREAT IDEA*.

AND WHAT'S THAT ENTAIL?

IT'S PRETTY SIMPLE, BUT THE WHOLE THING HINGES ON WHETHER OR NOT THIS IS A CURE BLADE.

NOW, I'M NO DOCTOR, AND NON-ELVEN LIVES ARE WITHOUT VALUE, *BUT*...

ARE YOU SURE THIS WON'T TURN THE CORPSE INTO A ZOMBIE MAGE?

THAT'S WHAT THE FIRE IS FOR.

WELL, YOU'VE THOUGHT OF *EVERYTHING*.

A HEALING POTION I DROPPED AT THE APEX OF MY ASCENT!

ALL PART OF THE PLAN.

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DON'T YOU HAVE TO DRINK HEALING POTIONS?

ORDINARILY SMASHING GLASS BOTTLES AGAINST YOUR FACE WORKS JUST AS WELL THOUGH, EVERYONE KNOWS IT

CHANGING THE SUBJECT TO AVOID FURTHER SCRUTINY, IT LOOKS LIKE WE HAVE ALL MORE OR LESS ARRIVED

WAIT A SECOND, WHAT ABOUT BLACK MAGE?

I BET HE WENT ON AHEAD OF US TO GATHER INTEL AND SUPPLIES AND WHATNOT IN TOWN.

HM, THE COMPLETE LACK OF EVIDENCE THAT HE ***DIDN'T*** DO THAT PROVES THAT HE MUST HAVE!

RUMBLE!

OF COURSE, THERE ARE OTHER POSSIBILITIES.

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AND SO, IN THE TOWNSHIP OF LEFEIN...

LUPA.

LUPA.

LUPA.

LUPA.

LUPA.

LUPA.

LUPA.

LUPA.

LUPA.

LUPA.

LUPA.

LUPA.

LUPA.

LUPA.

LUPA.

LUPA.

USING MY INCREDIBLE LINGUATACTICAL ABILITIES, I HAVE FIGURED THEM OUT!

A STATEMENT LIKE THAT ONLY INSPIRES CONFIDENCE IN ME.

REALLY? I FIND IT A BIT DUBIOUS.

WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A CODE.

WHEN I STAB YOU IN THE EAR, THAT MEANS I'M BEING SARCASTIC. GOT IT?

I HAVE RESERVATIONS ABOUT THAT, VIS-A-VIS THE ***STABBING*** AND ALSO MY EAR.

I'LL TAKE THAT UNDER ADVISEMENT.

I ***SAID*** I FIGURED IT OUT!

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GO ON. LET'S HEAR IT THEN.

RIGHT! MY THEORY IS AS SIMPLE AS IT IS COMPLEX!

LORD

I BELIEVE THAT LEFEINISH CONSISTS ENTIRELY OF A *SINGLE* WORD.

WOW, THAT'S SOME ACE DETECTIVE WORK THERE

BUT THAT WORD CAN MEAN DIFFERENT THINGS DEPENDING ON THE INTONATION AND WHATNOT

IT'S AN ENTIRE LANGUAGE MADE UP OF ONE WORD?

OBSERVE!

LUPA, LUPA LUPA. LUPA!

LUPA.

LUPA!

LUPA LUPA.

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

HOW SHOULD I KNOW?

OH, IT WAS PROBABLY THE INCOHERENT RAMBLINGS OF A HOBO.

THE ODDS OF FORMING A COMPLETE SENTENCE *AT RANDOM* ARE EXCEPTIONALLY RARE.

AND THAT'S ASSUMING FIGHTER'S THEORY IS CORRECT IN THE FIRST PLACE, WHICH IS JUST LUDICROUS ANYWAY.

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IS HE.. GIGGLING IN HIS SLEEP?

MORE IMPORTANTLY. WHO CARES? WE'VE GOT TO FIGURE A WAY OUT OF HERE.

MUZZA MUZZA DIED LAST

ZZZ

GOOD NEWS! THEY'VE MOVED ON TO YE...ING.

IT MAY BEHOOVE US TO STOP FIGHTER FROM TALKING AT THEM.

WE ARE SO FAR BEYOND BEHOOVEMENTS AT THIS POINT

THEY'RE BRANDISHING THEIR WEAPONS! I SHOULD SHOW THEM A... MY SWORDS.

SO MUCH PROGRESS!

THEY'LL LET US OUT OF THIS JAIL IN NO TIME!

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ARE WE STILL HERE?

WHY HAS NO ONE TAKEN THE INITIATIVE AND DESTROYED THIS TOWN AND ALL THE LIFE WITHIN IT?

YOU WERE SLEEPING.

AND IT'S A GOOD THING, TOO. I HAD AN EPIPHANY.

IN YOUR SLEEP?

I CAN EPIPHANATE IN MY SLEEP, YES, THANKS.

DO YOU NEED NEW ROBES..?

SHUT UP. SHUT UP, SHUT UP!

I HAVE THIS ALL FIGURED OUT IF YOU WANT US TO LIVE, YOU HAVE TO DIE.

A) THAT SOUNDS SLIGHTLY COUNTER-INTUITIVE. B) DEFINE THE TERM "US."

THOSE ARE THE KINDS OF QUESTIONS THAT NEED TO BE IGNORED IF WE ARE GOING TO SUCCEED

GUARDS ARE COMING BACK

WE'LL BE OKAY, JUST LET ME DO ALL THE TALKING.

FIGHTER *YOU CAN'T SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE* OKAY?

WELL, OBVIOUSLY

BUT *THEY* DON'T KNOW THAT!

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THAT'S IT, I'M A'MURDERING.

NO, YOU ARE NOT

COME ON. IT'LL HELP US GET OUT

ANY *IDIOT* CAN SEE THAT YOUR BIG IDEA IS TO KILL US AND BURY YOURSELF IN THE PILE OF OUR CORPSES.

THUS, YOU WILL RELY ON THE NOTORIOUS LAZINESS OF GUARDS TO CHECK ONE BODY, ***MAYBE*** TWO, BEFORE DUMPING THEM ALL OUTSIDE WHERE YOU WILL BE FREE TO ESCAPE

THAT'S NOT EXACTLY WHAT I WAS THINKING

NECESSARILY

IT'S YOUR STANDARD SOLUTION FOR EVERYTHING, SO YES IT WAS.

WELL, I DON'T SEE *YOU* COMING UP WITH ANY B.G, BRIGHT IDEAS!

WAIT, I'VE *GOT IT*

WE'LL GO TO TRIAL!

AND..?

AND THE ENSUING MEDIA CIRCUS WILL HARKEN THE DECLINE OF SOCIETY!

THIS PLACE WILL BE A BARREN LAWLESS WASTELAND IN FIFTY YEARS AND ***THEN*** WE CAN MAKE GOOD OUR ESCAPE!

FIFTY *YEARS*.

PLUS OR MINUS, HMM, FIFTEEN YEARS, DEPENDS IF THEY GET A BRIEF PERIOD OF ENLIGHTENMENT OR NOT

WE NEED SOMETHING THAT'S FASTER ACTING. AND MORE EXPLOSIVE, I THINK

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WHAT IS THIS?

I'M ESCAPING.

AND I'M HELPING!

YOU CAN HELP MORE BY NOT MOVING, FIGHTER

SO WE'RE BACK TO THE MURDER PLOT, ARE WE.

IS KILLING A MAN REALLY MURDER?

YES.

WAIT, I HAD THIS ALL FIGURED OUT EARLIER.

ISN'T MURDER *ONLY* THE CRIME OF KILLING SOMEONE?

YES.

NO, THAT WASN'T RIGHT EITHER

I TOLD YOU TO WRITE IT DOWN.

I KNOW, I KNOW!

THERE IS THE OTHER, MORE PRESSING ISSUE THAT THE EXPLOSION WILL KILL US ALL.

STAND BACK AND YOU'LL BE FINE

STAND BACK? THIS CELL COULD DOUBLE AS A CLOSET IF IT WAS BIGGER.

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THIS IS INTERESTING. I MOVED FROM AN EXPLOSION TO A REALM OF UNNECESSARILY BLOOD RED CLOUDS.

THIS ISN'T HELL. NOT ENOUGH LAVA OR SCREAMING. THAT MEANS...

I'M IN *EVIL-DOER'S HEAVEN!*

CLOUDS EQUAL HEAVEN, WHILE THE BLACK AND RED MOTIF MEANS EVIL.

IT'S THE ONLY EXPLANATION THAT MAKES *ANY* SENSE.

IT'S ABOUT *DAMN TIME* I WAS ETERNALLY REWARDED

SO WHERE ARE ALL THE HOT BROADS, ANYWAY?

THIS ISN'T "EVIL-DOER'S HEAVEN"

AND I DOUBT VERY MUCH THAT THERE IS SUCH A PLACE.

SO. I'M NOT DEAD THEN?

WHAT AM I? A *DOCTOR?*

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THIS WON'T DO AT ALL.

SO, ARE YOU GONNA OBLITERATE ME OR WHAT?

IT'S NOT QUITE THAT SIMPLE.

WE WERE NEVER ABLE TO SECURE AN UNDERSTUDY TO THE AVATAR OF EVIL.

OH, BUT I INSIST. LET ME TAKE YOUR CLOAK.

IT IS THE ***CLOAK OF ALL HORRORS,*** A VEIL BETWEEN THIS WORLD AND AN ENDLESS NIGHT FROM WHICH THERE EXISTS NO ESCAPE. IT IS THE ROOT OF HOPELESSNESS AND THE ABYSS THAT GNAWS AT MEN'S SOULS.

BUT IT'LL GET ALL WRINKLY.

OH, THAT WILL BE OUR COOKIES.

I ***HAVE*** TO GET OUT OF THE MINISTRY OF EARTHLY AFFAIRS.

LOOK. WE HAVE A QUOTA TO MEET.

I'LL JUST HIT YOU WITH EVERY DARK FORCE IN THE BOOK AND YOU CAN GET TO WORK

REALLY?

NO. NOW WAKE UP

THAT HEALING PRAYER LOOKED LIKE A BUCKET

WHO'S THE PROFESSIONAL HERE?

ALSO, YOUR FRIEND IS NOW BAPTIZED INTO THE CHURCH OF THE TRIPLE-HEADED FISH GOD

Splash!

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WHAT JUST HAPPEENED?

WHAT HO, FELLOW ADVENTURERS ALL!

OH COME ON

HOW DID YOU GUYS SURVIVE?

YEAH, DIDN'T YOU FOLLOW THE COMPLETELY FAKE

NEWS REPORTS ABOUT POISONOUS, MAN-EATING BEES? GOOD THING THOSE WERE FAKE INSTEAD OF THE MAP WE GAVE YOU.

WE HAD A SPOT OF DIFFICULTY WITH YOUR MAP TO RAT TAIL ISLAND, ACTUALLY, GOOD SIR

OH, MY YES. IT WAS AS IF IT HAD NO BASIS IN REALITY WHATSOEVER.

HOW UTTERLY "UNINTENDED"

IN FACT, THERE WAS NO RAT TAIL ISLAND AT ALL.

YEAH, JUST THE MOON.

WAIT, WHAT?

THE MOON.

YOU WENT TO THE MOON?

IT WAS AN OKAY PLACE TO VISIT, BUT I WOULD **NOT** WANT TO LIVE THERE

NOTHING TO DO, OR BREATHE.

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SO WHAT ARE YOU GUYS DOING HERE ANYWAY?

RANGER IS A QUARTER LEFEINISH.

A DUAL-CLASS HALF-ELVEN RANGER WHO'S ALSO A QUARTER LEFEINISH? WHAT'S THE FINAL QUARTER?

HALF-ORC.

OKAY.

LEMME SEE. HALF-ORC.

CARRY THE SIX.

WAIT, IF HE'S PART LEFEINISH, THEN HE CAN UNDERSTAND THEIR STUPID LANGUAGE!

MINUS THETA.

THAT'S NOT HOW GENETICS WORK.

I KNOW THAT, IT'S HOW *LINGUISTICS* WORK!

ACCORDING TO MY CALCULATIONS, RANGER HAS SEVENTEEN GRANDFATHERS, TWO OF WHOM HAVEN'T BEEN BORN YET

CLERIC, I HAVE A KNIFE IN MY HEAD AGAIN

AND I'VE GOT HUMAN STUCK TO MY FOOT

AND I SUFFER NOTHING AT ALL!

BLACK MAGE!

ALMOST NOTHING AT ALL.

I CAN UNDERSTAND LEFEINISH, BY THE WAY

WELL, SOME OF IT.

JUST THE PREPOSITIONS, REALLY

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AND SO, THANKS TO RANGER, WE LEARNED THAT THE LEFEINISH PEOPLE WERE POSED TO DO SOMETHING TO, WITH, AT, OR POSSIBLY *ON* SOMETHING OR SOME*ONE* ELSE

NATURALLY, WE THOUGHT OF YOU.

AND WE NATURALLY ASSUMED JAIL TIME WAS INEVITABLY INVOLVED

SO WE EXECUTED A DARING DAYLIGHT RESCUE AS FITTING OUR HEROIC IDIOM.

YEAH, WE'VE GOT AN IDIOM TOO.

HIYA.

IDIOM. I *SAID* IDIOM.

IDIOT, BLACK MAGE. IT IS PRONOUNCED "IDIOT"

QUICKLY SOMEONE CHANGE THE SUBJECT BEFORE MY BRAIN HERNIATES ITSELF

I DON'T THINK THAT'S MEDICALLY

CHANGE THE SUBJECT ALREADY!

PRAY TELL, GOOD SIR LIGHT WARRIORS, WHAT BUSINESS HAD YOU IN THE KINGDOM OF LEFEIN?

WE'RE HUNTING DOWN CLUES TO THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE FABLED ORB OF WIND.

OH, THE OLD WIND ORB QUEST?

ARE YOU GUYS ONLY GETTING AROUND TO DOING THAT NOW?

WE DID THAT AGES AGO.

DUN DUN DUN?

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I ASSUME WE KNOW WHAT IS TO BE DONE NOW.

SLIT THEIR THROATS, TAKE THEIR WALLETS, AND TELL SARDA WE DID THE AIR ORB THING.

SLIT THEIR BELLIES, URINATE INTO THE WOUNDS, MAYBE RUB IN SOME DIRT, AND LET SEPTIC SHOCK SET IN.

OR WE COULD ASK THEM HOW TO DO THE QUEST

JUST A THOUGHT

I DON'T FOLLOW

DOING SOMETHING THAT ISN'T PSYCHOTIC, IT'S CRAZY, I KNOW. I'M THROWIN' IT OUT THERE.

FRANKLY, I DON'T SEE WHAT THAT WOULD ACCOMPLISH FOR US.

MAYBE IT'S LIKE A FEINT

'SPLAIN.

WE START A NICE, FRIENDLY CONVERSATION. THEN, **BAM**, THE MUGGING.

AND **THEN** URINATING

WHAT? I GOTTA GO!

AND WHAT DO YOU NEED A **VICTIM**?

IT JUST FEELS LIKE I'M WASTING MY TIME IF SOMEONE ISN'T HURT

OH, SURE, WE'LL TELL YOU HOW TO DO THE QUEST

IT'S PRETTY EASY, REALLY

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GOOD NEWS, GUYS! I GOT THE "DOWN LOW" FROM THE OTHER WARRIORS!

FIRST, I THINK YOU MEANT "LOW DOWN" AND SECOND, NEVER TRY TO USE SLANG. EVER

ANYWAY THEY DREW US A MAP!

A castle thing

rocky things like mountains

Monster

(not to scale)

RIVER

some trees

OCEAN

Or a lake

possibly lava?

some other trees

LAKE

(boat might not be there now)

WELL?

FIRST YOU HAVE TO PROMISE NOT TO KICK ME IN THE FACE

IT'S A LITTLE VAGUE.

SEE, EVEN THE IDIOM CAN TELL THAT IT'S USELESS.

I DON'T KNOW.

THIS MAP IS NO ACCIDENT THEY'RE SCREWING WITH US.

SURELY WE COULD FIND SOME OF THE LANDMARKS AND GO FROM THERE

THE MOST DISTINGUISHING FEATURES ARE "ROCKY THINGS" THAT ARE "LIKE A MOUNTAIN."

Y'KNOW WHAT..

TEN MINUTES AGO...

OH, SURE, WE'LL TELL YOU HOW TO DO THE QUEST.

IT'S PRETTY EASY REALLY

ROGUE, YOU HAVE CONTACTS WITHIN THE DARK, SEEDY UNDERBELLY OF CARTOGRAPHY.

I KNOW A GUY

BUT IT'LL COST YA.

FIVE MINUTES AGO...

PSST I NEED A MAP.

NOTHING FANCY LIKE ACTUAL CORRELATION TO OBJECTIVE REALITY JUST SOME TREES, AND I DON'T KNOW, LIKE A MOUNTAIN.

THE USUAL FEE.

.. THE MAP IS USELESS.

SO LET'S THROW IT AWAY BEFORE WE NOTICE ANYTHING FAMILIAR ABOUT THE HANDWRITING.

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WHAT A BUNCH OF JERKS!

WELL, THEY BROKE US OUT OF JAIL. THAT'S GOT TO COUNT FOR SOME-THING.

SURE IT DOES. A SWIFT ***KICK IN THE TEETH!***

BUT THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT KIND OF HORRIBLE THINGS THE LEFEINESE WERE GOING TO DO TO US

LUPA, LUPA.

LUPA, LUPA LUPA. LUPA.

LUPA LUPA! LUPA.

LUPA, LUPA.

LUPA.

UH, SPEAKING OF WHICH, ISN'T THAT THE TOWN BACK THERE?

IT'S NOT MUCH OF A PRISON BREAK IF WE JUST ***HANG OUT*** WITHIN PLAIN VIEW

WE COULD TALK TO THEM. Y'KNOW, EXPLAIN OURSELVES.

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SO THIS WHOLE LEFEIN THING WAS A HUGE WASTE OF OUR TIME.

NO ADVENTURE IS A WASTE IF YOU'VE LEARNED SOMETHING.

I COULD USE SOME MORE HATRED. PLEASE TELL ME WHAT WE LEARNED

YEAH, YOU GET BACK TO ME ON THAT ONE.

I'VE GOT IT!

RIGHT! I'VE GOT YOUR BACK OF THE... WHAT?

OH, GOOD

ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS TRAVEL AROUND THE GLOBE AND TALK TO A PEOPLE WE ALREADY TALKED TO.

I'VE TALKED TO PEOPLE BEFORE

THEY CAN OFFER US NOTHING.

THAT WAS BECAUSE WE HAD NOT YET GONE FAR ENOUGH INTO THE QUEST.

BUT NOW WE'VE UNLOCKED THE HIDDEN STORES OF KNOWLEDGE WITHIN AN NPC SOMEWHERE IN THE VAST OVERWORLD.

PROBABLY

YOU WANT US TO INTERVIEW ***EVERYONE IN THE WORLD***

WITHOUT ***ANY*** MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION, MIND YOU.

UNTIL WE FIND THE ***ONE GUY*** WHO ***MIGHT*** HAVE SOMETHING NEW TO TELL US.

IT'S AN EXAMPLE OF WORKING ***SMARTER***, NOT HARDER

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OKAY, SMART GUY AND HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO TRAVEL ACROSS THE WORLD WITHOUT AN AIRSHIP?

THAT'S EASY

MONTAGE!

YEAH, THAT'LL DO IT.

WAIT, WHAT?

MY HOME IS PRAVOKA, A BEAUTIFUL PORT CITY EAST OF HERE.

SERIOUSLY, WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

THE ELVES LIVE ACROSS THE SEA.

OH, WE ARE NOT IN ANOTHER VILLAGE!

THEY SAY THE ANCIENT PEOPLE USED A STONE TO MAKE THEIR SHIP FLOAT

THE FIRE FIEND WILL BURN EVERYTHING UP!

WHY IS THIS IN THE DESERT? I QUIT!

FOR TEN YEARS I PROBED FOR THE FLOAT-ER

THAT'S GREAT, WE MONTAGED TO A FUTURE FILLED WITH FECAL PERVERTS.

YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE AIR ORB?

JUST GO TO LEFEIN, EVERYONE KNOWS THAT

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SO HERE WE ARE, AGAIN, ***STRANDED*** IN THE MIDDLE OF ***ANOTHER*** ASININE QUEST WITH NO IDEA WHAT TO DO OR WHERE TO GO.

AND WHOSE FAULT IS IT, YOU ASK? WHY, IT'S DORK MAGE'S FAULT, JUST LIKE IT ALWAYS IS!

WHY DO WE LISTEN TO DORK MAGE? WHAT HAS HE EVER DONE FOR US THAT WORKED?

HE MAKES A KILLER SALAD.

HE'S A WIZ AT LAUNDRY TOO. LOOK HOW CLEAN MY LITTLE NINJA BOOTIES ARE.

YES, OKAY, FINE. BUT SALADS AND FOOTWEAR DO NOT DECISIVE TACTICAL THINKING MAKE!

WHAT'S HE EVER DONE FOR US THAT WAS OF ANY ACTUAL VALUE?

MY STRATEGEMS DEFEATED ALL THREE FIENDS THUS FAR FACED, AND I'M THE ONE WHO DISCOVERED HOW OUR CLASS CHANGES WORK

TODAY.

WHAT HAS HE DONE FOR US TODAY!

HE'S PISSED YOU OFF, THAT'S ***ALWAYS*** ACES IN MY BOOK.

OH, THAT'S REALLY FUN—

KHOOM!

THANKS AGAIN!

WHAT A PLEASANT FELLOW

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WHY DOES HE *KEEP* DOING THAT TO ME?

HE *MUST KNOW* YOU.

NYA NYA *NYA* NYA.

SERIOUSLY IS HE AIMING FOR ME OR WHAT?

CAN YOU BLAME HIM? A FALL FROM THAT HEIGHT WOULD BREAK HIS LEGS.

I *KNOW*

AND, I MEAN, WHO ELSE IS HE GOING TO LAND ON?

I GOT A COUPLE IDEAS.

FIGHTER IS ARMORED

THIEF WOULD DODGE HIM, SUE HIM, OR NINJA FLIP KICK HIM..

ALL OF THE ABOVE.

AND I'VE THE LEAN LOOK OF A NATURAL AND DEADLY JUNGLE PREDATOR

JUMPING ME WOULD BE SUICIDE

UH-HUH.

YOU, HOWEVER, ARE PLUMP AND WEAK, THE PERFECT PREY.

FRANKLY IT'S A WONDER YOU DON'T GET CRUSHED MORE OFTEN.

WHAT! HE WAS LIKE THAT WHEN HE STARTED TALKING.

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WE'RE MAKING THIS HARDER THAN IT IS.

WE USED TO GUEST ALL THE TIME WITHOUT A FANCY AIR-SHIP

ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS POOL OUR RESOURCES AND PUT THEM TO USE.

WE GOT NUTHIN'

WE'RE BRIMMING WITH MAGICAL WEAPONS AND, LIKE, SUPER POWERS.

WE MAKE THE ORDINARY AMAZING!

TAKE MY **HAT** FOR EXAMPLE

ON ANY-ONE **ELSE**, IT'S MERELY A SAUCY ACCESSORY

BUT ON **ME**, IT'S A **+2 KNIFEHAT.**

WHAT'S IT GOT A **+2 IN?**

..KNIVES?

KNIFEHAT

THAT'LL GO WELL WITH THE **FIREFACE** I'M ABOUT TO GIVE YOU.

SEE, **THIS** IS WHAT I WAS TALKING ABOUT!

WITH JUST A LITTLE INGENUITY, WE ALREADY HAVE TWO MYTHICAL ITEMS OF POWER.

TELL ME ARE THE KNIFEHAT AND FIREFACE PART OF A GREATER SET?

LIKE MAYBE A PAIR OF DANGEROUS PANTS?

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AH, THE SEEDY TAVERN. THE PRIMORDIAL SOUP FROM WHICH MANY AN ADVENTURE HATH SPAWNED.

THEY HAVE PRIMORDIAL SOUP HERE?

APPETIZERS APPETIZERS

THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT

HOPE IT COMES WITH MACROSCOPIC CHUNKS.

CHIPLOSION BOWL? BACON ENCHILADA?

OH, IF ONLY THESE WALLS COULD SPEAK, THE TALES THEY WOULD TELL!

WELL, TALKING ***WALLS*** WOULD PROBABLY DRIVE CUSTOMERS AWAY

THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT

PROBABLY SCARE KIDS.

FRITTER ROLLS? ***CORN*** BLASTERS?

YEAH, THE DECOR HERE ***IS*** A BIT MORE FAMILY ORIENTED THAN I EXPECTED.

WHAT WITH THE ***LIGHT***

AND THE TOTAL LACK OF BARBARIANS.

DON'T FORGET THESE TOTALLY AWESOME ACTIVITY PLACE MATS!

CHEESE ***MUNCH*** CREAM BALLS?

YEAH, THOSE ARE NEW TOO.

I'M GONNA ORDER A BREAKFAST BURRITO THE SIZE OF MY ***HEAD***!

AND IT'S NOT EVEN BREAK-FAST TIME!

BATTER WEDGES? CHICKEN FRIED ***BUTTER*** STICKS? DO..DO YOU USE A FORK?

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SIRE, I BROUGHT THE LATEST—

OH, I'M NOT YOUR KING.

OKAY WHO ARE WE TODAY THEN, SIR?

NOT THE KING, BUT STILL STEVE.

STRANGER.

JUST BECAUSE YOU THINK YOU'RE NOT KING TODAY DOESN'T MEAN YOU DON'T KNOW ME ANY-MORE

THAT'S A GOOD POINT, GARY.

I ENDEAVOR TO PLEASE.

YOU WILL SERVE YOUR KING WELL.

AND I ASSUME THAT'S STILL NOT YOU, IS IT?

OH, HEAVENS NO.

I LOST MY KINGSHIP TO RODNEY IN LAST NIGHT'S POKER GAME.

YOU BET THE ENTIRE KINGDOM AND LOST?

OH, MY YES. QUITE BADLY

TO YOUR OWN RIGHT HAND MAN, RODNEY, WHOM I HAVE NEVER ACTUALLY *MET* DESPITE BEING YOUR LEFT HAND MAN.

THE LEFT HAND CAN NEVER KNOW WHAT THE RIGHT HAND IS DOING. THAT'S THE FOUNDATION OF MY KINGLY PHILOSOPHY, YOU KNOW

ALSO RODNEY IS IMAGINARY, SO...

YOU LOST THE KINGDOM IN A CARD GAME AGAINST *YOUR-SELF*?

AS IT TURNS OUT, I'M A VERY GOOD CARD PLAYER.

BUT ALSO A VERY, *VERY* BAD ONE

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WELL, I STILL HAVE THE LATEST REPORTS FROM THE WAR AGAINST THE ELVES.

SOUNDS LIKE A MATTER FOR THE KING'S EARS.

KING RODNEY

YES.

THE IMAGINARY

YES, IS THAT GOING TO BE A PROBLEM?

I DON'T KNOW HOW TO ANSWER THAT

MAYBE YOU COULD DELIVER THE REPORT

ME? OH, I RATHER THINK NOT, NO.

THE OLD KING WOULD KILL MESSENGERS WHO BROUGHT ILL NEWS.

OR GOOD NEWS.

OR NO NEWS AT ALL.

SOME SAY HE WAS QUITE MAD, Y'KNOW

GARY?

I'M *CAREFULLY* CONSIDERING HOW TO REPLY TO THAT

ANY LUCK?

WANNA PLAY A CARD GAME?

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I CAN'T BELIEVE THEY HAD THE GALL TO CALL THAT FOOD.

I CAN'T BELIEVE WE ATE IT

THE BISCUITS WERE MADE OUT OF LEAD

SOLID GODDAMNED LEAD

FRIED LEAD

I THINK I CAN SEE THROUGH TIME

WE ALL ATE THE BISCUITS, FIGHTER. WE CAN ALL SEE THROUGH TIME.

THE YAWNING CHASM AT THE END OF ALL THINGS ISN'T QUITE AS OPPRESSIVE AS WHAT'S CHURNING IN MY GUT

YOU MEAN THE TURKEY SANDWICH?

YEAH, I THINK THERE WAS SOMETHING IN IT

SOMETHING LARVAL.

SURELY WE CAN BEST THIS DINNER

WE'VE DEFEATED ALL SORTS OF THINGS, LIKE WITCHES AND DRAGONS.

AND A WITCH ON A DRAGON.

YEAH, THAT'S A MEMORY WE NEEDED RIGHT NOW.

AND THAT'S WHEN YOU SUGGESTED ANOTHER POKER GAME.

YES.

AND THAT'S WHY A LENGTH OF STRING IS NOW OUR RULER

ER YES.

AND IT WAS ELIGIBLE IN THE FIRST PLACE BECAUSE...?

WELL, WE NEEDED A FOURTH.

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OKAY, LET'S FORGET ABOUT THE AIR ORB.

DONE!

YAAAAY!

WE'LL DO SOME JUICY SIDEQUESTS UNTIL WE FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE ORB.

WHAT DO *YOU* CARE ABOUT ALL THIS ANYWAY?

YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT?

DO YOU HAVE **ANY** IDEA WHY EVERY IMPOVERISHED CLUMP OF HOVELS YOU PEOPLE CALL TOWNS ARE SO IMPOVERISHED, CLUMPED, FILTHY, AND HOVELED?

YOU THREW "FILTHY" IN THERE

I WANTED TO GO WITH "COVERED IN THE SHIT OF TWENTY GENERATIONS OF HIDEOUS, STINKING APE-MEN," BUT I WAS RUNNING OUT OF BREATH.

AH. WELL, TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTION, NO, I DON'T.

NEITHER DO THEY! SO LET'S MOVE BEFORE THEY CATCH ON TO ME ER. IT

BECAUSE IT'S CERTAINLY NOT ME

SAYING THAT ONLY MAKES ME SUSPECT YOU MORE.

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YOU HAVE THE LOOK OF A MAN FOR WHOM THE MOST MENIAL TASKS MUST BE IMPOSSIBILE

PARDON?

TELL ME! WHAT INCREDIBLY SIMPLE CHORE ELUDES YOUR *MEAGER* INTELLECT

I DON'T FOLLOW

WHAT DO YOU NEED DONE?

WELL, I'M GOING TO THE GENERAL STORE TO BUY A NEW SHOVEL.

A NEW SHOVEL.

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO WALK THROUGH LIFE WITHOUT ANY SENSE OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY?

TO THINK NOTHING OF EXPECTING AN ELITE CADRE OF WARRIORS TO ATTEND TO YOUR EVERY WHIM AND WORRY NO MATTER ITS INSIGNIFICANCE

TASKS *SO* IMPORTANT THEY MUST DELAY THE WORK OF MEN RESPONSIBLE FOR ENSURING THAT THE ***SUN WILL RISE AGAIN*** – YET THEY ARE TASKS THAT YOU CANNOT BE BOTHERED WITH PERSONALLY AS IT MAY INTERFERE WITH YOUR SCHEDULE OF RIGOROUS MASTURBATION.

LEAVE ME ALONE, I ONLY WISH TO REPLACE A SIMPLE BROKEN HANDLE!

KNOW WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH THE *OLD* HANDLE, DON'T YA?

THIS IS WHY I KEEP INSISTING THAT THIEF SHOULDN'T CONDUCT THESE INTERVIEWS.

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WATCH A *PRO* AT WORK

IS HE GOING TO *FIND* ONE, OR ?

THAT'S MY ASSUMPTION.

EXCUSE ME, MISS.

HELLO THERE.

WE'RE A ROVING BAND OF ARMED MISFITS LOOKING FOR SOMETHING TO DO, AND WE THOUGHT YOU MIGHT FIT THE BILL.

SOME OF OUR BEST FINDS HAVE BEEN PEOPLE HIDDEN AWAY IN NARROW ALLEYS LIKE THIS WHERE NO ONE CAN EASILY SEE YOU.

RAPE GANGS AT LARGE! AGAIN!

CHRONIC RAPE GANG PROBLEM BLAMED ON DECAYING DOWNTOWN - MAYOR FORMS TASK FORCE

A familiar problem reared its ugly head earlier today when a local woman was approached by a man

idiotic hat," she said, mirroring council woman Ander's doubts that we will ever see an end to

misunderstanding. "These may be legitimate adventurers, but who can tell? What we need is registra-

THAT'S A *HELL* OF A MEDIA THEY'VE GOT

I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK THE CONVERSATION WOULD HAVE ENDED DIFFERENTLY HAD MY PANTS STAYED *ON*

YOU *REALLY* SHOULD WORK ON YOUR CONVERSATIONAL SKILLS.

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EXCUSE ME.

YOU'RE NOT ONE OF THOSE HORRIBLE RAPE GANGERS, ARE YOU?

NO, THOSE ARE...UH, YOU'RE THINKING OF SOME OTHER GUYS.

THEN WHAT ARE THEY DOING?

LEERING?

PUNCHED!

LURKING?

AGAIN!

THEM? UH, I DON'T KNOW WHO THEY ARE, BUT THEY LOOK INNOCENT

DON'T *LIE* TO THE POOR LADY, RM.

YOU KNOW EXACTLY WHO WE ARE, AND WE DON'T LOOK INNOCENT AT ALL.

ALL I'D TRUST THOSE TWO JOKERS WITH IS A STAB IN THE BACK AND THEN THE THROAT

AND YOU WEAR A *MASK* VERY SUSPICIOUS SAYS ME.

I LOOK OKAY, AND SEEM HONEST, BUT AS FAR AS SHE KNOWS IT'S AN ELABORATE ACT

A RUSE THAT WORKS *SO WELL* MY OWN FRIENDS COULD NEVER SUSPECT -- NEVER *CONSIDER* -- THE EVIL I INFLICT UPON INNOCENTS WHERESOEVER WE GO!

HE'S JUST KIDDING OF...

OF COURSE

OKAY, I DON'T WANT HELP ANYMORE, GUYS.

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OKAY. I'M TIRED OF THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS WE KEEP HAVING WITH THESE PEOPLE, SO WE'RE GOING TO TRY SOMETHING NEW

THIS THING WHERE WE HAVEN'T ALREADY KILLED EVERYONE HERE?

THAT'S SOMETHING NEW, AND I DO NOT APPROVE.

THAT WAS JUST A FLUKE... THAT NEVER STOPPED ANYWAY! I WROTE A NOTE.

Dear Sir or Madam,

I represent a troupe of adventurers. We are currently offering to fulfill quests!

Available services include, but are not limited to, the righting of wrongs, the slaying of beasts, and the collection of items whether fantastic or mundane - possibly in relation to the previous two.

Sincerely,
The Light Warriors - saving you from the horrible fate of non-reading!

SIMPLE AND DIRECT GOOD

NICE HANDWRITING, SALLY

I'LL SHOW IT TO PROSPECTIVE QUEST GIVERS. WE'LL BE BACK TO DO-GOODING BEFORE YOU KNOW IT!

THERE WILL BE NO MORE MISUNDERSTANDINGS. EVERYTHING WILL BE BETTER

HONESTLY, IT'S OUR OWN FAULT FOR LETTING HIM OUTSIDE

I HAVE TO SHOW YOU WHAT'S IN MY POCKET!

IT WILL MAKE EVERYTHING BETTER!

WHAT HAPPENED TO US?

SIDE-QUESTS USED TO FALL INTO OUR LAPS.

NOW EVERYONE MISTAKES US FOR CLOWNS OR PERVERTS.

WELL, TO BE FAIR, THAT'S NOT SO MUCH INCORRECT AS IMPRECISE.

GUYS, GUYS, GUYS, GUYS!

GUYS, GUYS, GUYS, GUYS!

TSK, I HATE IT WHEN HE GETS ***OVERSTIMULATED*** LIKE THIS.

GUYS, GUYS, GUYS, GUYS!

I GOT US A SIDE-QUEST!

WHAT IS IT?

SO I NEED YOUS GUYS TO "SMUGGLE" MY "ILLEGAL" GOODS. GOT IT?

REPUTABLE!

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AH, IS THERE ANY SIGHT MORE GLORIOUS THAN THE SIDE-QUEST?

I CAN THINK OF A FEW, BUT THEY INVOLVE NUDITY

AND THEN MURDER.

AND THEN *CARVING*.

FIGHTER DELIVERS THOSE CRATES...?

YES.

AND THEN WE *ALL* GET PAID FOR IT?

YES.

EVEN THOUGH IT'S A MINDNUMBINGLY TRIVIAL TASK AND WE'RE NOT DOING A DAMN THING TO HELP HIM OUT?

YES.

GODS BLESS THE MAN WHO INVENTED, UH, WHAT DID YOU CALL IT?

PARTY EXP SHARE RANGE

WHEW, THOSE ENORMOUS CRATES SURE WERE HEAVY

YES, WELL, I'D HAVE HELPED WERE IT NOT FOR MY NEW CHRONIC BACK INJURY

RIGHT, AND I'M ALLERGIC.

TO, UM, CRATES.

TO THE QUEST GIVER!

AND THEN GOUGING.

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WHAT'S ALL THIS THEN?

I'D SAY THEY'RE *CRATES*, SIR. BIG ONES AT THAT

GOOD LORD, BOY. A SHARP ANALYTICAL MIND LIKE YOURS IS COMPLETELY WASTED IN THE CITY GUARD

YOU THINK SO, SIR?

It is my sad duty to inform you that your son Pvt Doomed To Fail, died of multiple sword-wounds to the neck earlier this morning during a routine investigation. Though this is the third such death suffered by the department in the last month to involve my own personal sword, it is my opinion that there is no foul play

SIR?

SORRY, JUST THINKING OF A LETTER I'LL HAVE TO WRITE LATER

WHAT SHOULD WE DO WITH THESE BOXES THEN, SIR?

WE CAN'T VERY WELL LEAVE THEM HERE IN FRONT OF HEADQUARTERS, CAN WE?

GET SOME OF THE MEN TO TAKE THEM 'ROUND BACK.

AND STOP TICKING WHILE YOU'RE AT IT

TICKING, SIR?

ARE WE THERE YET?

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DID YOU COME HERE ALONE?

YES, COMPLETELY ALONE.

WITH ALL OF MY FRIENDS.

HIYA.

WHAT DID I SAY TO YOU BEFORE YOU LEFT TO DO THE THINGS YOU DID?

I DUNNO.

THERE WERE WARNINGS VIS A VIS THAT YOUR LEGS WOULD BE *VERY* BROKEN SHOULD YOU NOT COME BACK ALONE.

AW. KICKY AND STANDY? BUT I LOVE THOSE GUYS

YOU CAN'T BREAK OUR LEGS.

I AM A "LEGITIMATE BUSINESSMAN" LEG BREAKING IS ALL I DO.

OH, BELIEVE ME, NO ONE HERE UNDERSTANDS OR APPRECIATES THAT AS MUCH AS ME

BUT OUR LEGS ARE ALREADY BROKEN.

SO YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO LET US GO.

I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU *ONE* CHANCE TO COME UP WITH A BETTER EXCUSE. I SUGGEST A PLAUSIBLE ONE.

AH. EXCUSE ME.

WE'RE IN TROUBLE. HE'S *NOT* A MORON.

WELL THAT'S *NOT FAIR*

I HAVE A PLAN.

THAT'S NOT FAIR EITHER

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SO WHAT'S THE PLAN HERE, PROFESSOR?

SIMPLE: WE RUN AWAY USING THE *VERY* LEGS HE WISHES TO BREAK!

I LIKE IT. NEEDS A SWORD FIGHT IN THE MIDDLE, BUT WE CAN BURN THAT RIVER WHEN WE CROSS A BRIDGE OVER THE BUSH WITH TWO BIRDS IN GLASS HOUSES.

THAT *REALLY* GOT AWAY FROM ME AFTER "SWORD FIGHT"

BOSS, BOSS! THERE'S A THOUSAND GUARDS COMING TOWARD US!

A THOUSAND?!

OR MAYBE IT WAS TEN. I DIDN'T REALLY COUNT

THEY'RE PROBABLY MAD BECAUSE WE BOMBED THEIR HEADQUARTERS AND KILLED THEIR FRIENDS.

'COURSE, THEY WOULDN'T KNOW THAT IF THEY HADN'T FOLLOWED YOU BACK TO US!

NOW I'LL HAVE TO KILL YOU AND THEN BREAK YOUR LEGS.

OKAY, *DIFFERENT* BUT SIMILAR PLAN.

WE KILL *OURSELVES* AND *THEN* RUN AWAY

THUS THWARTING H.M ON *BOTH* FRONTS AT ONCE.

HONESTLY

IT'S A VICTIMLESS CRIME

BOSS, WE COULD USE THEM IN A WAY THAT KILLS THEM AND SAVES OUR "LEGITIMATE" SKINS!

GOOD IDEA. GLAD I THOUGHT OF IT.

THAT'S WHY YOU'RE THE BOSS. YOU'RE NOT AFFRAID TO GO VAUDEVILLE ON A GUY

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OKAY, YOU CHUMPS DISTRACT THE GUARDS SO I CAN ESCAPE.

SO *WE* CAN ESCAPE. RIGHT?

SURE

AND IN RETURN YOU *WON'T* KILL US OR BREAK OUR LEGS?

I NEVER SAID THAT

SO WHAT INCENTIVE IS THERE?

YOU GO RIGHT AHEAD AND ASK CAPTAIN POOPSON YOURFACE AND SERGEANT CANN IBAL ABOUT THAT

WOW, LOOK AT ALL THE INCENTIVE I FOUND

WHO CARES?

GET ME TO THE ROOF, I'LL DO A LITTLE BIT OF THE HADOKEN THING, AND WE'LL HAVE SOME CORPSES WHERE OUR PROBLEM USED TO BE.

NO, WE CAN'T DO THAT

YEAH, YOU'RE RIGHT. IT WOULD SUCK TO WIN.

WE HAVE TO USE ALL OF OUR CUNNING ON THIS ONE. IDEALLY AT THE SAME TIME.

GOOD LUCK WITH THAT

I'LL BE UP ON THE ROOF KILLING PEOPLE UNTIL WE'RE ALLOWED TO PROGRESS.

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WHERE IN THE *HELL* ARE THE STAIRS IN THIS PLACE?

I MEAN, SERIOUSLY, HOW *IS* A FELLOW SUPPOSED TO SHOOT ELECTRIC DOOMSDAY FROM THE ROOFTOP WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A LADDER?

GOOD. I FOUND YOU

YES

THAT IS "GOOD"

THE GUARDS ARE SURROUNDING THE WAREHOUSE TO OVERWHELM US

THEREFORE, *WE'LL* SPLIT UP TO OVERWHELM *THEM*

WELL, OF *COURSE*.

THE FIRST GROUP WILL CONSIST OF FIGHTER AND THIEF. FIGHTER AND I WILL BE THE SECOND

YOU AND FIGHTER WILL MAKE UP THE LAST GROUP

I DON'T THINK YOU THOUGHT THIS THROUGH AS MUCH AS YOU *THINK* YOU HAVE

HOW SO?

YOU PUT FIGHTER IN ALL THREE GROUPS

EXACTLY! IT TRIPLES OUR FRONTLINE POWER IN ONE FAILED SWOOP!

THAT'S NOT THE ACTUAL PHRASE BUT IT'S FITTING

EACH TEAM WILL ADOPT A *CODENAME* TO CONFOUND OUR ENEMIES

NAMELY

UNCANNY, ASTONISHING, AND EXTREME

THEY REFER TO THE AMOUNT OF VICTORY EACH TEAM IS ASSURED

OKAY, THEY REALLY WON'T FIGURE *THAT* ONE OUT

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ROLL CALL!

TEAM UNCANNY (AS IN THE AMOUNT OF VICTORY)!

AND TEAM ASTONISHING (AMOUNT OF VICTORY)!

DON'T THINK ABOUT HOW STUPID THIS IS

DON'T THINK ABOUT HOW STUPID THIS IS

AND TEAM EXTREME (ALSO THE AMOUNT OF VICTORY)!

HEEHEE. WE'RE BETTER THAN THOSE GUYS 'CAUSE WE RHYME

OKAY, THAT DID IT I'M OUT

BUT WHAT ABOUT TEAM EXTREME?

IT STILL RHYMES!

MAKE IT FIGHTER AND FIGHTER!

THAT'S JUST STUPID FIGHTER CAN'T BE IN **TWO PLACES** AT THE SAME TIME.

I COULD TRY BEING IN THE SAME PLACE AT TWO DIFFERENT TIMES

MEANWHILE, ON THE OTHER SIDE.

WHAT'S ALL THIS THEN?

I hope no guards come through this door and kill us.

-The Jerks Who Blew You Up

HOW DUMB WOULD YOU HAVE TO BE TO LEAVE THISLYING AROUND?

ABOUT AS DUMB AS WE'D HAVE TO BE TO IGNORE IT!

RARGH!

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RARGH!

RA.

YARGH

WOO.

THINK I DROPPED MY SPEAR

HRM.

I FEEL A *DISTINCT* LACK OF MOMENTUM SUDDENLY

OH, THAT'S JUST GREAT

CHARLIE, GET THE LIGHTS, WILL YA?

CHARLIE, *WHEN* DID YOU GET EVIL GLOWY EYES?

YO.

UM.

OH DON'T WORRY. IT'S NOT MINE

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ONE THOROUGH HOSE-DOWN LATER

SO WE'RE DONE HERE. RIGHT?

ACTUALLY, IT OCCURS TO ME THAT THERE NOW EXISTS A POWER VACUUM.

THE ENEMY OUTNUMBER US A PALTRY THREE TO ONE!

BUH?

GOOD ODDS FOR ANY GUARD!

THERE'S ONLY FOUR OF US.

BE THAT AS IT MAY!

WE WILL DO WHAT WE WERE **TRAINED** TO DO, WHAT WE WERE **BRED** TO DO, WHAT WE WERE **BORN** TO DO!

THAT'S NICE **WHO** ARE YOU?

M.A.R.T.A.N.S! WHAT IS YOUR PROFESSION?

CROSS-WORD PUZZLE EDITOR

I'M A PET GROOMER

NO, WE ARE THE MUNICIPAL ARMED RESERVISTS AND TROOP AUXILIARY NETWORK.

WE ARE M.A.R.T.A.N.S!

IT'S JUST THE THREE OF YOU, IS IT?

I THINK THE UNIFORM IMPEDES OUR RECRUITING

BUT THE WORLD WILL KNOW A FEW STOOD AGAINST MANY!

IT'S REALLY MORE LIKE A FEW STANDING AGAINST A FEW OTHERS.

HE COULD BE COUNTING ME MULTIPLE TIMES HE CAN'T BE BLAMED FOR THAT

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YOU REALLY DON'T WANT TO DO THIS.

WE'VE GOT TWO WIZARDS, ONE OF WHOM IS STUFFED WITH MORE APOCALYPSE THAN THREE WIZARDS COMBINED, AND THE OTHER ONE CAN DUPLICATE IT A...

RM, THEY CAN HARDLY COUNT TO FOUR, LET'S NOT COMPLICATE THINGS FURTHER WITH WORD PROBLEMS.

THIS IS WHERE WE HOLD THEM!

LIKE, INTIMATELY OR ?

NO! THIS IS WHERE WE FIGHT

DAMMIT, DUDE I CAN RAIN ROCK AND FIRE ENOUGH TO BLOT OUT THE SUN.

THEN WE WI... DIG IN THE SHADE!

FINE BY ME

NO, WAIT I WANT TO CHANGE MY RETORT.

CRUNCH.

SO WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT A POWER VACUUM, ANYWAY?

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IT SEEMS TO ME THAT WITH THE CITY GUARD AND MUNICIPAL RESERVES "INDISPOSED"

FOR REASONS TOTALLY UNCONNECTED TO US.

HMM.

AND THE CITY ORGANIZED CRIME SYNDICATE ON THE RUN, THIS TOWN IS RIPE FOR THE PLUCKING.

OOOOOOOOOOH!

PLUCKING!

HE SAID PLUCKING!

OOOOOOOOOOH.

PLUS, I THINK WE CAN REVITALIZE THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR BY SELLING THEM OUR FABLED "STARMETAL" AT RIDICULOUS PRICES.

THAT IS NEITHER A STAR NOR A METAL. IT'S A BRITTLE CHUNK OF ROCK.

WHAT IF I USE FIVE CHUNKS?

SURE. THAT'LL WORK. AND HEY, WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, GET FIVE APPLES SO I CAN HAVE A SAMMICH.

MORON.

I BELIEVE IN MAGIC AND THAT STILL MADE NO SENSE

IN THE ARENA OF LOGIC, I FIGHT UNARMED

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CAPITALIZING ON THE UNIQUE MARKET FORCES OF THIS REGION, I HAVE FORMED A BUSINESS MODEL FORGED OF EQUAL PARTS ***GUARANTEED*** AND ***SUCCESS***.

IS IT WIDE SCALE URBAN RENEWAL?

BECAUSE I CAN DO WONDERS IN THAT VEIN WITH A ***LITTLE*** BIT OF FIRE AND THEN ***A WHOLE LOT MORE FIRE***.

NO, WE ARE GOING TO SELL OUR SERVICES.

CAN DO!

DIFFERENT SERVICES.

WE WILL SELL PROPERTY OWNERS THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHTS TO ***NOT*** HAVE EVERYTHING THEY OWN GET DESTROYED BY US.

I LIKED THIS IDEA BETTER WHEN IT WAS ***MY*** IDEA AND IT WAS ABOUT KI...ING.

THE PRICES WILL BE EXORBITANT

THUS, IT WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE TO PAY FOR THESE SERVICES EVENTUALLY

SO, AT THAT POINT, WE WILL WRECK THEIR LIVES AND ABSCOND WITH ANY REMAINING ITEMS OF VALUE.

AND THIS IS LEGAL?

NOW THAT WE'RE THE ***CITY GUARD***? YES.

WAIT, WHEN DID THAT HAPPEN?

FIVE SECONDS AGO, WHEN I THOUGHT OF IT

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ONE *MINOR* DETAIL REMAINS, HOW-EVER.

OH, THAT WELL, *YOUR* SHARE OF THE "PROTECTION" MONEY WILL, ODDLY, BE THE EXACT AMOUNT YOU WILL PAY *ME* TO NOT ROB FROM YOU.

THAT'S... NOT AT ALL WHAT I-

WAIT

YOU'RE EXTORTING *US* WHILE WE'RE OUT EXTORTING THE CITY?

NO, NO, NO.

WE'RE "PROTECTING" THE CITY FROM WHAT WE'LL DO IF THEY DO NOT PAY US.

RIGHT EXTORTING

"PROTECTING."

AND I GUESS YOU'RE "PROTECTING" OUR SHARE OF THE CASH?

YES. IF YOU'RE ALLOWED TO HAVE MONEY, THERE IS A *CHANCE*, HOWEVER SMALL, THAT YOU'LL GIVE IT TO SOMEONE WHO IS NOT ME.

YEAH, IT'D BE A REAL SHAME IF I WASN'T *ALWAYS* ON THE VERGE OF STARVATION.

YOU CAN EAT AND SLEEP WHEN YOU'RE DEAD

FELLOWS?

WHAT, SALLY?

DEBORAH, ACTUALLY

WHAT I MEANT EARLIER IS THAT WE HAVEN'T TOLD FIGHTER YET

AH.

WE'RE HEROES!

HOW CAN WE CONVINCE FIGHTER TO LET US CAUSE, PERPETUATE, AND PROFIT FROM THE SUFFERING OF OTHERS?

HIYA.

WELL, HE'S AN *IDIOT* THAT CAN WORK FOR US.

IT NEVER HAS BEFORE

HMM...

IT MAY NOT BE POSSIBLE TO TRICK ME, 'CAUSE OF HOW SMART I AM.

OH! WE COULD GIVE HIM A MEANINGLESS TASK.

ONE THAT'S UNNECESSARILY COMPLICATED, STUPIDLY TIME-CONSUMING, OR IMPOSSIBLE.

WE CAN TELL HIM HE'LL GET AN ULTIMATE WEAPON *IF* HE WINS A RACE IN ZERO-POINT-ZERO SECONDS!

THAT IS SLIGHTLY *TOO* IMPOSSIBLE.

I'D NEVER FALL FOR IT ANYWAY

OKAY, SO CHANGE IT TO WINNING, I DUNNO, *TEN* ROUNDS OF WHATEVER INANE SPORT THE LOCAL RUBES PLAY!

HM, YEAH. IT'LL TAKE THEM ALL DAY JUST TO EXPLAIN THE RULES TO HIM.

THIEF?

WE'LL BE RUNNING THIS TOWN IN A MATTER OF HOURS. MAKE IT SO.

THAT'S NOT QUITE PLAUSIBLE ENOUGH.

HEY, GUYS! I NEED TO WIN *FIFTY* ROUNDS FOR MY SECRET GUEST TO GET AN ULTIMATE WEAPON.

YOU KNOW HOW TO PLAY?

SURE, WHY NOT? ALSO, WHAT IS IT?

DROWNBALL!

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LIVE

GOOD MORNING, SPORTS FANS! IT'S ANOTHER BEAUTIFUL DAY FOR DROWNBALL!

FOUR MEN ENTER, **NO ONE** LEAVES.

LIVE

THAT'S RIGHT, TOM, THOSE ARE THE RULES TO OUR ***ABSURD*** CULTRUAL OBSESSION.

I DO NOT ENVY THESE YOUNG MEN TODAY, AND NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF THEIR SENSELESS, IMMINENT DEATHS.

LIVE

NOR I, THANKS TO NEW-COMER, ***FIGHTER*** WHO IS ***ACTUALLY*** WEARING A SUIT OF PLATE ARMOR

MY FIRST TRY AND I'M ***ALREADY*** ALMOST DROWNED.

THIS IS GONNA BE THE ***EASIEST*** F F TY GAMES I EVER WON!

LET'S TAKE A MOMENT TO SEE WHAT'S COMING UP LATER TODAY

ALEXANDRIA

TUE WED THUR

78° 90° 68°

DPS CHALLENGE SERIES!
DRAGOONS VS. DARK KNIGHTS
WILL NEED SUPREME
TONIGHT @ 8PM

NAGA

TATIVES OF THE ESPER AND AEON LEAGUES MET EARLIE

NDA

NDA

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GOOD MORNING, SIR HOW CAN WE HELP YOU HERE AT THE FIRST BANK OF--

WE'LL BE NEEDING A DONATION, THANKS.

EXCUSE ME?

Y'KNOW A GIFT TO A FUND OR CAUSE CHIEFLY FOR CHARITABLE REASONS.

IN THIS CASE, YOU ARE GIVING ME MONEY BECAUSE I'M FEELING CHARITABLE ENOUGH TO TAKE IT WITHOUT USING EXCESSIVE FORCE.

THIS IS A ROBBERY?

NO, ROBBERY IS WHAT MY *FRIENDS* ARE DOING.

ROBBERY AND *SOME* MURDER

THIS BANK IS OOZING WITH MAGIC ALARMS! THE CITY GUARD WILL BE HERE AT ANY MOMENT!

THERE'S SOMETHING TRAGIC AND *HILARIOUS* YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT THAT

POP

'CAUSE *WE* ARE THE CITY GUARD NOW!

I DON'T THINK HE HEARD YOU, BM.

HE GOT THE MESSAGE THOUGH.

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ER... A THOUGHT OCCURS.

YOU DON'T HAVE THE RANK TO SPEAK

YEAH!

YOU HAVE EVEN *LESS* RANK.

GODDAMN CHAIN OF COMMAND EVERYONE LOWER THAN ME IS AN *IDIOT*, AND EVERYONE HIGHER HAS HIS *HEAD UP HIS ASS*.

HOW DO I GET A SPEAKING RANK?

YOU DON'T. BUT I'LL ALLOW A REPREIVE OF PROTOCOL.

EXTORTION IS FINE. I MEAN, WE CAN JUST BARGE INTO ANYONE'S HOME AND TAKE THEIR STUFF ANYWAY IT'S OUR RIGHT AS MAIN CHARACTERS.

BUT I HAVE TO DRAW THE LINE AT SERIAL MURDER.

OH, COME *ON!* ALL THEY DO IS WALK BACK AND FORTH SPOUTING THE SAME MORON PHRASES AT ANYONE STUPID ENOUGH TO BUMP INTO THEM.

FRANKLY, I'M DOING THEM A FAVOR

YOU'RE RIGHT THEY DON'T HAVE MUCH TO LIVE FOR AS NPCS

NPWHATSA?

ALSO, IS THIS, UH...IS THIS GOING TO STOP ANY TIME SOON?

IT'S STARTING TO GAG ME OUT, Y'KNOW?

FINALLY

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STILL. WE SHOULD THINK ABOUT KILLING *LESS*.

LOOK, THEY COME TO *ME* TO DIE. I CAN'T STOP THAT ANY MORE THAN I CAN STOP KILLING.

IT MAY BE CONSIDERED GRIEFING.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT THAT MEANS, AND I DON'T *CARE* TO KNOW

THOUGH A DROWNING REPRIEVE

YOU WERE THE FAVORITE GOING INTO TODAY'S MATCH THANKS TO YOUR *DARING* STRATEGY OF WEARING A FULL SUIT OF ARMOR

ARMOR IS MADE OF METAL

THAT IT IS, FIGHTER. THAT IT *SURELY* IS.

AND YET, EVEN WITH THAT COMMANDING ADVANTAGE, YOU CAME IN *LAST*

WHAT WENT WRONG?

WELL, I DID A THING WHERE I DIDN'T DROWN.

THAT PROBABLY HURT MY CHANCES. ALSO, I'M NOT SURE WHERE THE BALL COMES IN. ?

BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME, FIGHTER

I'M AIMING FOR SECOND TO DROWN.

MEANWHILE, AS THE SOLE SURVIVOR OF TODAY'S MATCH, FIRST PLACE NOW DEFAULTS TO YOU!

THIS IS PERFECTLY LOGICAL!

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ONE HOUR LATER...

I CAN'T BELIEVE WHAT A BUNCH OF PUSH-OVERS POPULATE THIS TOWN.

IT'S LIKE THEY'RE TERRIFIED OF NOTHING MORE THAN THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE. AND THEN THE VIOLENCE ITSELF

THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS TO A SOCIETY THAT RELIES ON HEROES TO DO EVERY-THING FOR A FEW GENERATIONS.

OH, GOOD THE GUY WHO BELIEVES MATHEMATICS RUN THE UNIVERSE HAS ANOTHER THEORY

EVERY TIME THERE'S AN INVASION BY MONSTER WARLORDS, OR AN END OF THE WORLD, THEY LOOK FOR PEOPLE LIKE US.

WELL. NOT LIKE *US*

GRANTED

OBVIOUSLY.

BUT IF YOU DO THAT LONG ENOUGH, YOU'LL FORGET HOW TO STAND ON YOUR OWN. THESE PEOPLE DON'T KNOW HOW TO PUT UP RESISTANCE

AM I THE ONLY ONE WHO HEARD A CASH REGISTER JUST NOW?

I HEARD ONE FALLING OVER, LIKE FROM THE BACK-LASH OF A BOLT SPELL.

YOU'RE RIGHT

OUR PROTECTION RACKET *IS* GREAT, BUT PROVIDING CONCRETE INCENTIVES TO *BE* PROTECTED WOULD BE GREAT

SO... WE'RE GOING TO *ROB* THEM NOW?

YES.

HOW IS THAT DIFFERENT FROM WHAT WE'VE BEEN DOING ALL ALONG?

VERY SLIGHTLY

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LOOK WHO'S COME BACK

I AM DISTRESSED TO FIND YOU HERE STILL.

THIS IS OUR HIDE-OUT

OH. I'M SORRY PLEASE, EXCUSE ME WHILE I MERCILESSLY BEAT MY LACKEY JUST OUTSIDE TO SAVE FACE

WAIT, WHAT?

THIRTY-FOUR MINUTES LATER

YOU WERE LYING WHEN YOU SAID WHAT YOU DID BEFORE.

WHAT TIPPED YOU OFF?

CERTAIN EVIDENCES OUTSIDE

THE HIDEOUT THAT THE MOB BOSS USES FOR HIS CRIME STUFF.

WHY IS IT COVERED IN BLOOD?

I WAS USING IT AS A CLUB

YOU WERE GONE FOR HALF AN HOUR. IT TOOK YOU *THAT* LONG TO FIGURE OUT IT WAS YOUR OWN SIGN?

NO.

MOST OF THAT WAS SPENT BEATING THE HELL OUT OF MY LACKEY FOR BLEEDING ON THE SIGN WHEN I BEAT THE HELL OUT OF HIM WITH IT

OH. I SEE.

NOW, THEN. I AM *DISTRESSED* TO FIND YOU HERE STILL.

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THE THING IS, WE'RE MOBBING IT UP BETTER THAN YOU DID

WE'RE ROBBING HALF THE TOWN TO SCARE THE OTHER HALF INTO BEING EXTORTED WE'LL SWAP HALVES IN A WEEK

AND WE'RE THE CITY GUARD.. TO THE EXTENT THAT WE CALL OURSELVES THE GUARD AND NO ONE ARGUES WITH OUR SWORDS.

LOOK, I HAD A GOOD THING GOING HERE. WHAT WITH LACKEYS, AND PETTY MAIL BOMBINGS, AND KICKBACKS, AND CRIME STUFF BUT YOU'RE RUINING ALL OF IT

YUP PROBABLY BECAUSE NO ONE CAN STOP US.

IF THERE'S ONE THING I LEARNED AT LEGITIMATE BUSINESS SCHOOL, IT WAS THAT CRACKIN' A GUY'S HEAD OPEN IS A GOOD WAY TO STOP H.M.

BUT WE OUTNUMBER YOU.

THREE-TO-ONE ODDS WON'T BE SO BAD AFTER I CRACK ONE OR THREE OF YOUR HEADS OPEN.

COUNT AGAIN!

WHUD!

WELL, *THIS* IS SOMETHING OF A LET DOWN.

THUD!

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WHY AM I KNEE-DEEP IN DEAD NINJA? I DON'T REMEMBER SLAUGHTERING ANYONE IN PAJAMAS. RECENTLY

WELL, MY LAWNINJA APPEAR TO BE DEAD

OUR NEW ADVERSARY IS SO POWERFUL HE SINGLE-HANDEDLY KILLED YOUR ENTIRE LAWNINJA SQUAD WITHOUT MOVING A MUSCLE!

NINJAS DID THE WHAT?

NO. NO, I FORGOT TO FEED THEM.

FEED THEM?

YEAH, Y'KNOW LIKE A PET

WHAT DO YOU FEED NINJA, ANYWAY?

WHAT! FIFTEEN GIL FOR A BAG?

WHAT DO THEY MAKE THIS FOOD OUT OF, *TWENTY* GIL?

FORGET IT THEY CAN LIVE OFF THE LAND PROB-ABLY

NOT NUTS AND BERRIES, I GUESS.

MAYBE THEY'RE ONLY NAPPING. WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU FED THEM?

UH, *NEVER*? IS THAT A TIME? NEVER?

I DON'T GET IT. IF THEY'RE DEAD, HOW DID THEY KNOW WHEN TO DEPLOY? HELL, HOW HAVE THEY BEEN FOLLOWING US?

THEY ARE *EXCEPTIONALLY* TRAINED.

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CAN WE GET ON WITH THE LEGITIMATE BUSINESS, TO WHICH I MEAN VIOLENCE.

OH, YOU'RE STILL HERE.

LET'S GIVE HIM A LITTLE OF THE OLD SIGMA-OMEGA-FOUR

WILL YOU STOP? YOU KNOW DAMN WELL WE DON'T HAVE PRE-PLANNED MANEUVERS.

I'VE GOT DOZENS, BUT THEY'RE ALL SECRET TO PERPLEX OUR ENEMIES.

MY HATRED FOR YOU BURNS LIKE THE SKIN OF THAT GUY

THIS IS GOING TO IMPEDE BEAT INGS OF YOU BY ME

THIS WON'T HELP ANY

FOR THE RECORD, SIGMA-OMEGA-FOUR IS COOLER

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I SOME-HOW DOUBT THAT PLAN OMEGA-ALFAFA N.NER IS BETTER THAN USING FIRE TO KILL.

IT'S GOT LIGHTN.NG - *AND* EXPLOSIONS.

A DEADLY COMB.NATION, ALL RIGHT

WELL, YEAH, THAT'S THE WHOLE POINT

LESS TALK.NG, *MORE* NUK.NG.

HEY, ***WE'RE*** THE CASTERS. I THINK WE CAN DO THE JOB WITH-OUT GRABBING AGGRO, KTHX.

WHAT THE HELL K.ND OF WORD IS "K'THANX" SUPPOSED TO BE?

OH, IT'S AN ANCIENT TERM IN RED WIZARDLY TEACHINGS.

THE WORD ENJOYS A COMPLEX AND RICH HISTORY, BUT IT PRETTY MUCH MEANS, "ASSHOLE."

SHORTEN YOUR STREAM! I DON'T WANT MY FACE BURNED OFF!

YEAH, YEAH, STREAM'S TOO SHORT, ON IT

SO WHAT'RE YOU DOIN' AFTER THE ROAST?

THOUGHT I MIGHT GO SWIMMING

IT'S A NICE DAY FOR IT

?

WHAT?

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YEAH, LIKE IT'S *MY* FAULT THAT YOUR HAIR IS FLAMMABLE

YOUR CONTINUED ATTACKS FILL ME WITH EQUAL PARTS RAGE AND ANGER.

COME *ON!* HOW MANY *FLAMING CORPSES* DO WE HAVE TO HIT THIS GUY WITH, ANYWAY?

LEMME CHECK.

OH DON'T WORRY HE'S ONLY GOT TEN HIT POINTS LEFT

10/5500

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS, BU—

HE WAS REMARKABLY SPRY FOR BEING SO CLOSE TO DEFEAT

THIS IS WHY WE SHOULD REALLY PLAY BY THE GRIM AND GRITTY RULES.

RATHER, OUR *OPPONENTS* SHOULD

LIKE *HELL* I'M NOT GONNA USE MY *AC.*

GUYS, GUYS!

YOU'LL NEVER GUESS WHAT CHAMPION-SHIP I JUST WON!

I'VE GOT THIS ONE.

CHESS.

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NO, I'M A **DROWNBALL** CHAMPION!

WHAT THE HELL'S A "DROWNBALL" AND HOW DO YOU WIN?

I UNNO.

BUT APPARENTLY, I CAN HOLD MY BREATH FOR, LIKE, TWENTY MINUTES.

THE DOCTOR SAYS IT'S BECAUSE MY BRAIN USES SO LITTLE OXYGEN, I--

YEAH, WE DIDN'T ASK FOR YOUR LIFE STORY

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

WE'VE REPLACED ALL OF THIS TOWN'S CRIMINAL AND POLICE ACTIVITY IT'S TIME WE INFROMED THE MAYOR THAT **WE** ARE THE KINGS AROUND HERE.

WHY ARE THESE PEOPLE SLEEPING?

ER UH. **BECAUSE** THEY ARE TIRED?

WHY ARE **THESE** PEOPLE ON FIRE?

AH.

YOU ARE THE **WORST** MASS MURDERER I HAVE EVER MET

SERIOUSLY HIDING THE BODIES IS AS IMPORTANT AS THE MURDER

UM, THEY WERE COLD?

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I SAY, THIS IS *HIGHLY* UNUSUAL.

SHUT YER YAP-HOLE, MAYOR McUGLY

WE'RE RUNNING THIS TOWN!

BY *WHAT* AUTHORITY?

BY THE AUTHORITY THAT COMES FROM RUNNING THE POLICE *AND* THE MOB.

OKAY, SO YOU'RE FROM THE *GOVERNOR'S* OFFICE .?

THAT'S A GOOD LIE

MAYBE WE SHOULD GO WITH THAT

JUST COOPERATE, OR WE'LL DO *THIS*.

THERE *IS* SUCH A THING AS BEING TOO ILLUSTRATIVE

HEY, I DIDN'T WANT THERE TO BE ANY CONFU-SION.

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THE OCEAN WILL BREAK OUR FALL!

AND ALL OUR BONES. HITTING WATER AT THIS SPEED WILL BE LIKE HITTING THE GROUND.

BLACK MAGE, YOU'VE GOT A STUPID SPELL THAT'LL SLOW US DOWN, USE IT!

I'VE ALSO GOT ONE OF THOSE SUPERGODS LOOKING AFTER ME.

WAY I SEE IT, I CAST NOTHING AND ALL *YOU* CHUMPS DIE

WHOOOSH!

FWAM!

OBVIOUSLY, TELEPORTATION DOES NOTHING TO *REDUCE* THEIR MOMENTUM.

UNLESS I *WILL* IT TO BE

SCREW *THAT*

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I HAVE RECONSTITUTED YOUR BODIES MORE OR LESS PERFECTLY.

WHAT'S "MORE OR LESS" *SUPPOSED* TO MEAN?

LOOK, YOU HAVE REDUNDANT BIOLOGICAL SYSTEMS FOR A REASON, DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.

NOW THEN, THE AIR [redacted].

STALL HIM SO I CAN BUILD A FURNACE USING ROCKS AND OTHER, SMALLER ROCKS.

WHAT ON EARTH FOR?

TO GET US OUT OF HERE ALIVE, DAMMIT!

THIS IS A JOB FOR GLASS BLOWING. IT'S A BLOW—

I AM RECORDING THIS NEW ITEM INTO MY INVENTORY AS WE SPEAK.

THE ORB OF WIND, GIVE IT TO ME.

SEE, THE THING IS, SARDA, WE DIDN'T...

I'M A DROWNBALL CHAMP!

DROWNBALL CHAMPION?

HOW DOES—

YOU CAN'T—

THERE'S NO—

WHY WOULD THEY

COULDN'T POSSIBLY

WHERE'S THE REAL GAME IN ANYWAY? WHO CHOOSES TO DROWN?

IT'S TOO STUPID IN '00 RUNS WAYS TO BE REAL

I THINK WE BROKE HIS MIND

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SERIOUSLY THOUGH. ORB OF AIR.

WE NEVER QUITE GOT IT, ACTUALLY.

YOU WERE GIVEN..

AWAN!

AWAN!

...AMPLE TIME.

MY MOLECULES HURT

WE CAN EXPLAIN

AWAN!

AWAN!

NO, I PREFER THIS.

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ONE HOUR LATER

I SUPPOSE THAT'S ENOUGH, FOR NOW

AWAIT!

I WILL CHOOSE BLACK MAGE TO SUFFER BECAUSE I DON'T LIKE HIM.

THAT'S NOT RANDOM AT ALL!

WE CAN EXPLAIN!

LET'S COMPROMISE THEN.

ONE OF YOU, CHOSEN AT RANDOM, WILL SUFFER SO THAT THE OTHERS MAY EXPLAIN YOUR FAILURE.

[illegible] RANDOM [illegible] !

[illegible] FINE WITH [illegible]

THAT'S FINE WITH ME!

THAT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE SOMETHING I'D--

WHERE'S HE GOING?

TO HURT

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THE SHORT VERSION IS THAT EVERYONE IN LEFEIN IS A COLOSSAL JACKASS.

YES, THEY ARE FULLY TO BLAME. IF YOU REMOVE OUR INCOMPETENCE FROM THE EQUATION, THEN WE DID NOTHING WRONG.

ALSO, YOU SHOULD PROBABLY IGNORE OUR CRIME SPREE.

NOTHING WRONG!

THOSE CRIMES WERE COMMITTED AGAINST A WHOLE DIFFERENT TOWN, SO THEY HARDLY COUNT

FOR THE RECORD, EVERYONE IN LEFEIN DESERVED WORSE.

SO, IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT, **NOT** ROBBING THEM WAS THE GREATEST FAVOR EVER DONE IN THE WORLD

WELCOME TO HURT, AUSTRALIA

POPULATION: 0

WHY IS THERE A *SIGN* IN THE MIDDLE OF THE OCEAN?

WELCOME TO HURT AUSTRALIA

AND WHAT'S AN AUSTRALIA?

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ALL OF OUR HARD WORK HAS PAID OFF AT LAST!

LIKE A DROWNING PHOENIX, ONRAC IS REBORN! UH, AGAIN!

WE HAVE KNOWN HARDSHIPS AND WE HAVE KNOWN LOSS. BUT THIS WILL BE OUR GOLDEN AGE.

EVERYTHING IS GOOD AND IT WILL BE THAT WAY FOREVER!

THIS TIME, FOR REAL!

ONRAC WILL BE EVER-PEACEFUL!

YOU SAVED OUR TOWN ONCE MORE!

HUZZAH TO WHITE MAGE AGAIN?

HOW CAN WE EVER RE-RE PAY YOU?

ARE YOU CLOWNS FAMILIAR WITH THE PHRASE, "TO KILL TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE?

SURE

WHO ISN'T?

WAIT, IS THIS A WORD PROBLEM?

TURNS OUT IT'S *REALLY* EASY IF THE ROCK IS A CONTINENT

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WHAT.. WHAT HAPPENED? THIS CAN'T BE. THIS CAN'T JUST CAN'T BE!

NO. NO, NO, NO, NO!

NOT AGAIN! WHY DOES EVERYTHING I TOUCH TURN TO ASH?

WOW. WHAT A WAVE

YOU!

ME?

HOLD ON. I'M ALIVE?

TAKE THAT, AUSTRALIA!

A.K.A. THE STUPID CONTINENT FILLED WITH STUPID PEOPLE!

EDITOR'S NOTE: TRY SAYING THAT TO AUSTRALIA'S *FACE*

YOU DID THIS, DIDN'T YOU!

WELL, NOT EXACTLY, OR ON PURPOSE, BUT I DON'T REGRET IT EITHER.

HOW CAN THERE BE ANYTHING GOOD IN A WORLD THAT CONTAINS YOU IN IT?

THAT'S THE KIND OF PHILOSOPHICAL QUANDRY THAT CAN ONLY BE SOLVED WITH A STRIP TEASE.

SO... AM I GOING FIRST?

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IF I UNDERSTAND YOUR SIMPERING, YOUR WHOLE DEFENSE IS THAT YOU'RE TOO INCOMPETENT TO SUCCEED

WE DID BUILD A CITY-WIDE EMPIRE OF CRIME AND FEAR IN THE COURSE OF AN AFTERNOON. THAT'S GOT TO COUNT FOR SOMETHING.

CANDY I HOPE!

YES, IT COUNTS FOR SHUT UP.

DANG.

WE COULD TRY AGAIN.

MAYBE YOU COULD GIVE US SOME HELP. Y'KNOW. WITH ALL YOUR INFINITE POWER AND WISDOM?

UH, SURE, I'LL JUST DO THAT NOW

OH, WAIT!

I DIDN'T SPEND ETERNITY GAINING INFINITE KNOWLEDGE FOR YOU JERKS.

YOU THINK I'M A JERK?

OH, OF COURSE NOT, FIGHTER. BY THE WAY, HERE'S THAT CANDY.

FANKSH, SHARDA! YUR DA TOPSH.

YES, I KNOW

HOW MUCH COULD THIS TOWN HAVE WANTED TO LIVE, ANYWAY? I MEAN, ALL IT TOOK WAS ONE LITTLE MASSIVE FICTIONAL LANDMASS FALLING INTO THE OCEAN TO LEAVE A WASTELAND IN ITS PLACE

THAT TIDAL WAVE MAY HAVE PLAYED SOME SMALL PART IN IT AS WELL

I CAN'T KILL HIM

IT'S WRONG TO KILL

RIGHT?

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YOU ACTUALLY WANT ME TO BELIEVE THAT THIS IS ALL SARDA'S DOING?

SARDA THE GREAT SAGE.

THE GUY WHO IS HELPING ME TO SAVE THE WORLD.

I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'VE NOTICED, BUT HE'S KIND OF A JACK-ASS.

SARDA IS A BENEVOLENT FORCE OF ORDER AND LIGHT

WHAT MOTIVATION COULD HE HAVE TO DESTROY ONRAC?

A SENSE OF MERCY

WE CAN ARGUE ABOUT WHO MASSACRED WHOM UNTIL THEIR SEA-SOAKED CORPSES BLOAT IN THE SUN, OR..

..WE CAN MOVE ON WITH OUR LIVES.

BUT GOOD

NOW, JUDGING BY OUR SURROUNDINGS, EVERY-THING IN THE WORLD IS DEAD

WHAT ABOUT THOSE TREES?

AND I CAN HEAR BIRDS CHIRPING.

ALL ***HUMAN*** LIFE

WE OWE IT TO THE SPECIES TO BEGIN THE VERY SEXY PROCESS OF RE-POPULATING THE EARTH.

THOUGH THAT ***DOES*** MEAN THE NEXT GENERATION WILL NECESSARILY ENGAGE IN INCEST

AND THE GENERATION ***AFTER*** WON'T FARE MUCH BETTER

DAMN CREATION MYTHS.

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FOR THE LAST TIME, WHITE MAGIC CAN'T "*HEAL*" INCEST!

WELL, SURE, NOT THE ACT, BUT THE ***RESULTS***. AND MAYBE THE EMOTIONAL SCARS IF YOU'RE A BIG BABY

USE YOUR IMAGINATION! THE FATE OF ALL HUMANITY DEPENDS ON OUR KIDS GETTIN' IT ON ONE DAY

YOU REALLY DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT CURATIVE MAGIC IS AT ALL ABOUT, DO YOU?

UH, I KNOW IT'S A *THING*.

AND THERE'S MAGIC IN IT

IT'S THE ACT OF PUTTING ORDER "BACK" INTO A DISRUPTED SYSTEM.

HEALING DOESN'T JUST HAPPEN.

WOUNDS DON'T "DISAPPEAR." THE ORDER OF THE BODY'S NATURAL NON-WOUNDED STATE IS REINFORCED

IF WHITE MAGIC JUST FIXED THINGS, MADE THINGS ALL BETTER, ***TA-DA***, THEN WE'D HAVE NO DISEASE OR AGING OR PAIN. EVER.

YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO PUT A POINT IN THERE SOMEWHERE CUPCAKE.

MY POINT IS THE TWISTED OFF-SPRING OF THE INCEST THAT YOU ***WON'T STOP TALKING ABOUT*** THAT WOULD HAPPEN IF OUR ***THE-ORETICAL*** CHILDREN MATED IF WE HAD THE SEX THAT YOU ***WON'T STOP TALKING ABOUT*** COULDN'T BE "FIXED" THROUGH WHITE MAGIC.

SO YOU CAN STOP TALKING ABOUT IT!

BUT YOU ADMIT THAT REPOPULATION ***IS*** A VALID CONCERN HERE.

OH, LORD

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IT WOULD HELP TO PASS THE TIME

GIVE UP!

WHAT? I'M JUST SAYIN'

JUST DROP IT! WE ARE **NOT** GOING TO REPOPULATE THE EARTH!

GIVE ME ONE GOOD REASON.

I'VE GIVEN YOU DOZENS OF THEM!

ONE REASON THAT **DOESN'T** INVOLVE MY HYGIENE, THEN.

OKAY, HOW ABOUT THE FACT THAT IT DOESN'T NEED REPOPULATING? HOW'S THAT STRIKE YA?

YOU CAN'T PROVE IT **DOESN'T**! **HA!**

HEYA.

I SAW HER FIRST, FIND YOUR OWN GENETIC TIMECAPSULE, OR SO HELP ME, I'LL **CUT YOU.**

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

END OF THE WORLD, PROLIFERATION OF THE HUMAN RACE, ETCETERA.

THE WORLD IS FINE

PROBABLY IMPROVED NOW THAT ONRAC ISN'T STINKING UP THE JOINT

TOLD YOU.

THAT'S GREAT, GUYS. THANKS.

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ARE YOU HERE TO HELP RE-RE-REBUILD ONRAC?

HEY, LIKE TO COCKBLOCK

WHAT'S THE POINT? THEY'RE ALL DEAD

THANKS, FIGHTER.

I REALLY NEEDED TO BE REMINDED OF THAT

I'M SURPRISED I MEAN, IF I WAS IN YOUR SHOES, I'D FEEL PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR BEING UNABLE TO STOP OR AT THE VERY LEAST HEAL ALL OF THIS NEEDLESS DEVASTATION.

PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE.

THE TOTAL OBLITERATION OF A CITY UNDER YOUR PROTECTION. I DUNNO

TO ME, THAT SOUNDS LIKE THE KIND OF THING THAT CHANGES A PERSON

AND THEN IT MAKES YOU KILL EVERY-ONE ELSE IN YOUR ORDER TO STEAL THEIR POWER AND USE IT TO DESTROY THE WORLD SO THAT THESE THINGS DON'T EVER HAPPEN IN THE FIRST PLACE

FIGHTER, IF YOU REALLY BROKE HER MIND AND TURNED HER INTO AN AVATAR OF DEATH, THEN I TAKE BACK EVERYTHING I'VE SAID ABOUT YOU.

NOT OF THE THINGS I'VE SAID ABOUT YOU.

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WELL, NOW THAT WE'RE REUNITED, WE CAN TRACK DOWN THE AIR ORB!

YEAH, THAT'S TOTALLY IMPORTANT TO ME.

WE HAVE TO WHITE MAGE THE ORB OF CONFUSED AND PROBABLY IN AN EASILY SUGGESTABLE STATE. FIRST, MUST TRY TO SEX HER BUTT.

THAT GOT WEIRD *FAST*

OKAY, SO EVERYTHING YOU DO TURNS TO RUIN. SO WHAT? COULD BE WORSE.

HOW?

I, UH. HADN'T REALLY THOUGHT THAT FAR.

OKAY, I'VE GOT ONE!

YOU COULD SPEND YOUR WHOLE LIFE FIGHTING IT IN VAIN!

IMAGINE. YOUR *EVERY* EFFORT WOULD PLANT THE SEEDS OF MISERY FOREVER.

YUP. THAT'D BE TERRIBLE. YOU SHOULD *PROBABLY* GIVE IN ALREADY TO SAVE THE WORLD A TON OF SUFFERING.

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THE SCHOOL OF WHITE MAGIC TEACHES US THAT THERE IS A NATURAL ORDER TO ALL THINGS. A PLACE AND PURPOSE FOR EVERY PERSON AND EVENT

GO ON.

FIGHTING OUR ROLE IN THE FATE OF THINGS IS FUTILE

C'MON PERSONAL EPIPHANY!

IT'S PRETTY OBVIOUS AT THIS POINT THAT I AM NO GREAT HEALER. I AM **NOT** THE ONE THAT WILL BRING ORDER TO A DYING AND CHAOTIC WORLD.

ALMOST THERE.

THERE IS NO POINT IN DENYING IT ANY LONGER.

I AM WHITE MAGE, A DESTROYER OF WORLDS!

THAT IS SO HOT. MY GIRLFRIEND IS AN ***ARMAGEDDON*** FACTORY!

WHOAH, BUCK-O.

I MAY BE COMING TO TERMS WITH THE IDEA THAT I'M LOCKED INTO A LIFETIME OF SPREADING PAIN AND DEATH ACROSS THE WORLD, BUT I STILL HAVE ***SOME*** STANDARDS.

STANDARDS? WHAT A GYP!

YEAH, SHE SHOULD DROP EVERYTHING AND DATE YOU FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN YOU WANT HER TO.

THAT'S WHAT I'M SAYIN'!

UH, YEAH, I WAS POINTING OUT HOW STUPID THAT IS.

I DON'T FOLLOW

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ACCORDING TO SARDA'S INTEL, THE ORB OF AIR IS KEPT IN A TOWER, AND THE TOWER IS "SOMEWHERE"

I GOTTA SAY, THAT'S REALLY CRAPPY AS FAR AS INTEL GOES.

BUT IT'S FROM SARDA. HE KNOWS EVERY-THING.

HE'S ALSO A JERK

YEAH I THINK THAT'S WHERE THE "SOME-WHERE" COMES IN.

THAT'S A GOOD POINT. ALSO, JUST BECAUSE SHE HAS STANDARDS ***NOW***, DOESN'T MEAN SHE'LL CONTINUE TO HAVE THEM IN THE FUTURE.

WHAT?

DUDE, ***NO ONE*** IS TALKING ABOUT THIS.

ANYWAY

RIGHT

A FEW WEEKS OF WALLOWING IN EVIL WILL ***SURELY*** ERODE HER PERSPECTIVE UNTIL I STOP BEING HER MR WRONG AND START BEING ***MR. GOOD*** ***DASH.***

IT'S EMBARRASSING JUST TO WATCH THIS.

BM, ***WE DON'T CARE.***

WELL, NEW EVIL LIFE AND NEW EVIL ROBES. GUESS I OUGHTTA GET USED TO IT

CAN'T ***IMAGINE*** HOW MY CURRENT STANDARDS WILL SURVIVE THESE CHANGES.

FIGHTER? DO YOU WISH TO SAY SOME-THING?

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FIGHTER?

ARE YOU OKAY?

NO, WAIT THIS IS MY FIRST BIG CHANCE TO BE *EVIL*.

OKAY DON'T BLOW IT JUST START *SMALL* AND WORK YOUR WAY UP

I'll... GIVE HIM TEN SECONDS AND THEN IT'S EVIL TIME.

NO. *THAT'S* WHAT THE NICE WHITE MAGE WOULD DO.

FIVE SECONDS.

FIGHTER, YOUR INTELLIGENCE IS FOUND TO BE LACKING WHEN COMPARED TO THE AVERAGE INTELLIGENCE OF A GROUP OF YOUR PEERS.

YOU... YOU THINK I'M *DUMB*?

OH, DEAR GODS, I'M A *MONSTER*!

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AL.. THIS WOOING IS GETTING IN THE WAY OF OUR QUESTING.

JUST AS IN EVERY OTHER FACET OF LIFE, ELVES HAVE A VASTLY SUPERIOR MATRIMONIAL SYSTEM THAN YOUR HUMAN COURTING.

OH? WHAT DO YOU GUYS DO?

THESE DAYS IT'S A RITUAL OF BLACKMAIL AND COUNTER BLACK-MAIL.

I PREFER THE FORGING OF KEY DOCUMENTS TO ARTIFICALLY BANKRUPT THE POTENTIAL MATE'S PARENTS SO THEY'RE FORCED TO SELL THEIR CHILDREN INTO MARRIAGE.

BUT, I'M OLD FASHIONED, I GUESS.

THAT'S UH, THAT'S QUITE A SOCIETY YOU'VE GOT THERE.

HEY, GUYS. DO YOU THINK I'M DUMB?

OH.

UH.

I'M GOING TO ANSWER THAT IN THE FORM OF RUNNING.

WISH I THOUGHT OF THAT.

ER.

I CAN HONESTLY SAY I DO NOT *THINK* THAT YOU'RE DUMB.

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NOW WHAT?

COMA.

DRAGGING AROUND HIS LIMP BODY WILL IMPEDE US LESS THAN WHEN HE DOES THINGS.

THAT HAD NOT ESCAPED ME

OF COURSE LEAVING THE BODY WOULD BE EVEN BETTER FOR US.

THAT HAD NOT ESCAPED ME.

IS HE COMING OUT OF IT?

WELL, IT'S PROBABLY NOT IMPOSSIBLE.

SO THE PROGRESS WOULD BE CUT SHORT BY STABBING.

GUESS WE SHOULD TRY WAKING HIM UP THEN.

I'VE TRIED A FEW THINGS.

KICKING?

ISN'T THAT WHAT I SAID?

WHAT ABOUT WHITE MAGIC?

I ONLY HAVE RUDIMENTARY SPELLS.

TO CURE SOMETHING LIKE A COMA, YOU'D NEED A SPECIALIST.

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HEY, WHITE MAGE COULD YOU DE-COMA-FY BM?

HOLD IT

HEALING IS AN INHERENTLY GOOD ACT

BUT, HEALING SOMEONE LIKE BLACK MAGE CAN ONLY HAVE ULTIMATELY HORRIBLE REPERCUSSIONS.

IS AN ACT OF GOOD PERFORMED WITH EVIL INTENT STILL TO BE CONSIDERED A GOOD ACT?

I'M OVER-THINKING THIS WHOLE THING.

ALL I HAVE TO DO IS THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT THE OLD WHITE MAGE WOULD DO.

WHO KNEW BEING EVIL WOULD BE SO COMPLICATED?

WAIT

SHE WOULD HEAL INDISCRIMINATELY

THE OPPOSITE OF THAT IS PRECISION VIOLENCE.

UH, IS SHE GOING TO ANSWER US, OR..?

I THINK SHE'S WEARING HER ROBES INSIDE-OUT DID SHE GET STUPID SUDDENLY?

THEREFORE, INSTEAD OF HEALING THE WORLD, I HAVE TO..

OR MAYBE IT'S NOT-SO SUDDENLY?

..HURT RED MAGE

Y'KNOW, KICKING ME IN THE SHIN ISN'T VERY MATURE OF YOU.

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SERIOUSLY, I KNOW IT'S FUN TO KICK RED MAGE JUST FOR BEING SO RED MAGE...

IN FACT.

SON OF A--!

BUT WE REALLY SHOULD HEAL BLACK MAGE IF FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN TO MINIMIZE HIS WHINING LATER.

FUN IS FUN, BUT WE NEED TO GET SERIOUS.

PLEASE.

RED MAGE WILL STILL BE HERE TO SENSELESSLY ABUSE *AFTER* YOU CURE BLACK MAGE.

YNO, WAIT

LOOK, I DON'T REALLY DO THAT STUFF ANY-MORE.

FIGHTER SHOWED ME THE FUTILITY OF DENYING MY FATE AS A FORCE OF NEGATIVITY IN THE WORLD

HOW'D HE DO *THAT*? WITH A PUPPET SHOW?

NO, WITH *INSIGHT*.

INSIGHT INTO THE NUANCES OF PUPPET SHOWS, YOU MEAN?

PUPPETS ARE NOT REAL, BUT THEY ***REPRESENT*** THE REAL THROUGH ANIMATION BY A HIDDEN PERSON OR PERSONS.

TRULY, HIS WISDOM IS PEERLESS.

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OH, MAN. THAT WAS A *HELL* OF A NAP

NAP? I THOUGHT IT WAS A COMA.

NAP, COMA. THE IMPORTANT THING IS, I'LL TAKE ANY EXCUSE TO NOT TALK TO YOU UGLY MOOKS.

HEY, THIEF'S NOT UGLY!

HOW FAR HAS WHITE MAGE FALLEN AND HOW MUCH BOOZE WILL I NEED TO SEDUCE HER NOW?

SHE'S BEGUN A REIGN OF NEEDLESS KICKING THAT I DO **NOT** ENJOY

NEEDLESS ***KICKING***, EH? THAT'S EVIL.

WHAT'S SHE UP TO NOW AND WHERE'S THE NEAREST LIQUOR STORE?

LAST I SAW, SHE WAS TALKING WITH FIGHTER

THAT'S GOOD ANYTHING HE SAYS CAN ONLY HELP KEEP HER CONFUSED AND EASILY TRICKED INTO DRINKING TOO MUCH.

I THINK THEY'RE HAVING WHAT ***HE*** THINKS IS A PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION.

THANK YOU, FIGHTER THAT'S SOME.. REALLY GOOD ADVICE

NO PROBLEM AT ALL.

JUST FOLLOW THOSE NINETEEN EASY STEPS AND YOU... NEVER MISTAKE THE LIVING FOR A PUPPET

YEAH, WE STOPPED TALKING ABOUT PUPPETS A WHILE AGO.

MAYBE YOU DID

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I'M BACK FROM THE LIQUOR STORE

HOW? ALL OF CIVILIZATION FOR MILES AND MILES WAS WASHED OUT TO SEA.

ANKAN'S FINE WINES

MIGHT NOT BE PAINT THINNER

I'M VERY RESOURCEFUL, IS HOW.

SMELLS LIKE PAINT THINNER.

MIGHT NOT BE.

YOU KNOW SHE COULD DIE IF SHE DRINKS THIS.

THE WAY I SEE IT, THE BODY TAKES A WHILE TO COOL. SO, EITHER WAY, I GET WHAT I WANT

THAT MAY BE THE WORST THING YOU'VE EVER SAID.

SURE, WHY NOT NOW GET OUTTA MY WAY BEFORE--

THANK YOU, FIGHTER. YOU ARE TRULY AS A CANDLE IN THE DARK

KNEEL, O WARRIOR OF THE LIGHT

THANK YOU.

D'AWWW, SHUCKS!

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WHAT DID YOU SAY?

I SAID "HOW YA DOIN'?"

BEFORE THAT

I SAID "HEY, BLACK MAGE!"

BEFORE THAT TO WHITE MAGE!

OH, I JUST GAVE HER A LITTLE PEP TALK BASED ON WHAT YOU SAID

BASED ON WHAT I SAID..?

DON'T YOU REMEMBER, BUDDY?

REMIND ME.

YOU TOLD ME...

FIGHTER, IF OU REALLY BROKE R MIND AND TURNED R INTO AN AVATAR OF TH, THEN I TAKE BACK VERYTHING I'VE SAID ABOUT YOU.

AND SINCE WE'RE BESTEST BUDS, I KNEW THAT MEANT I MUST'VE SCREWED UP BIG TIME!

'CAUSE YOU WOULD ONLY SAY GOOD THINGS ABOUT ME.

BAD THINGS! I SAY VERY, VERY BAD THINGS!

YOU JOKESTER, YOU

I FINALLY GOT TO TALK TO WHITE MAGE ABOUT IT WHILE YOU RAN OFF TO A STORE OF SOME KIND

ANYWAY, WE STRAIGHTENED OUT THE WHOLE THING. GUESS IT WAS JUST A MISUNDER-STANDING.

I CAN'T THANK YOU ENOUGH, THOUGH.

IF YOU HADN'T SHOWN ME HOW THOUGHTLESS I WAS TO WHITE MAGE, I NEVER WOULD HAVE F.XED THINGS.

GHKT

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GOOD MORNING, BUDDY

WHAT'D YOU SAY?

I ALSO SAID GOOD MORNING.

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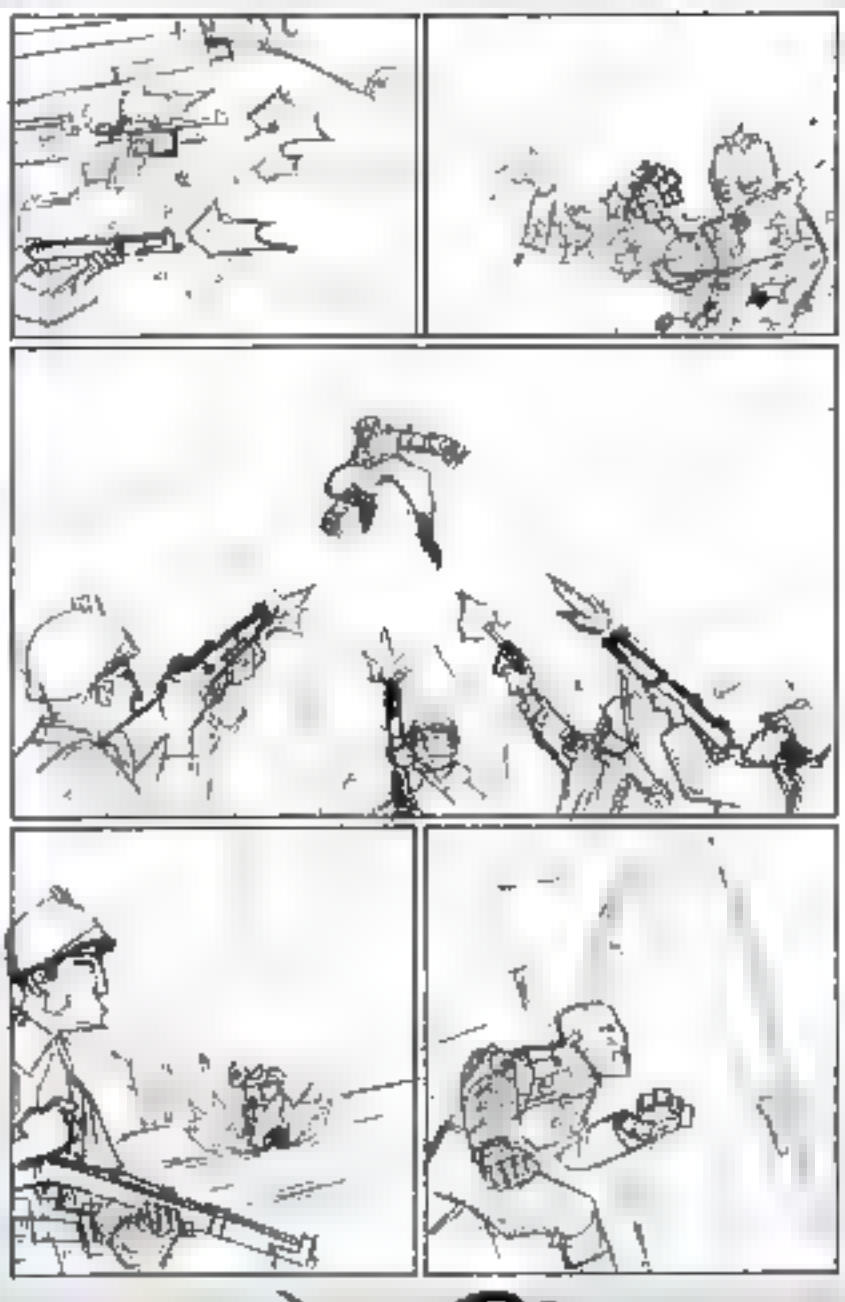
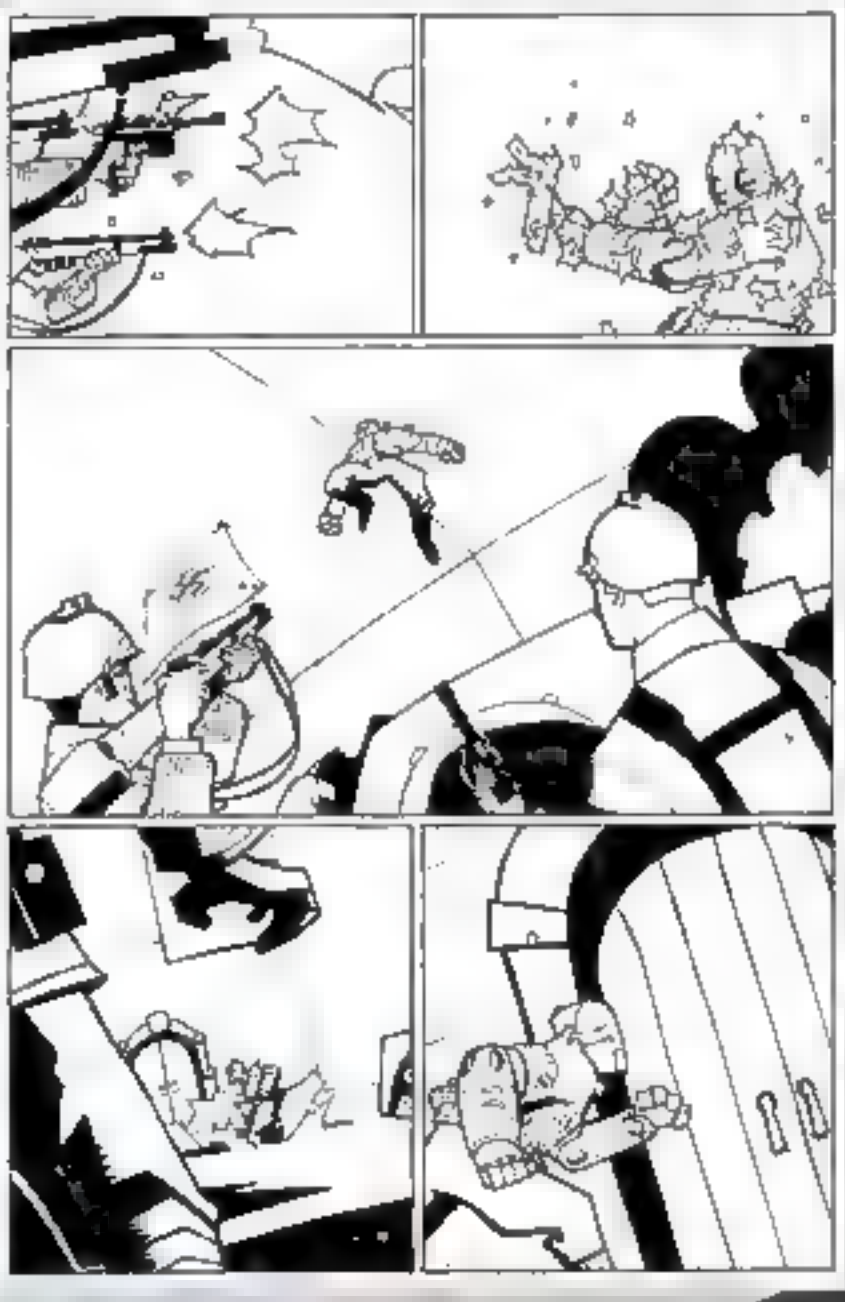
I'M AM

BLAM





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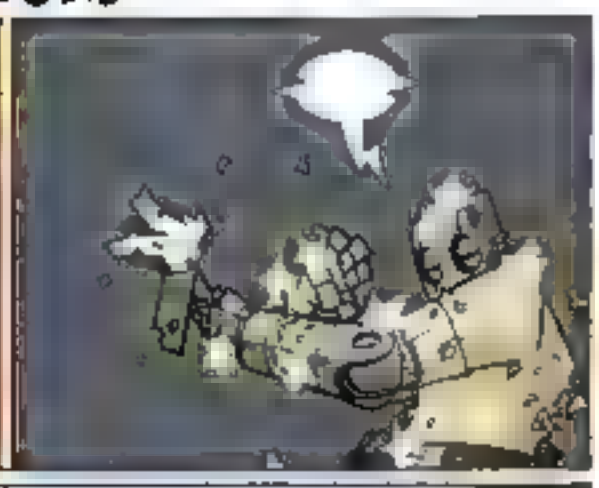
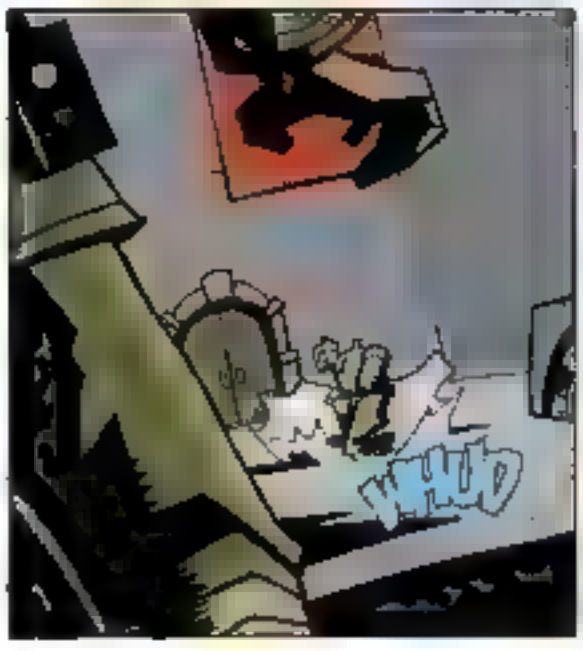


RED 5 COMICS

PRESENTS

ATOMIC ROBO

SPLENDID GEEK STEP-BY-STEP



COLOR!
5 COMICS
PRESENTS
ATOMIC ROBO
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STEP-BY-STEP

GREAT GAME, BUT NOT A STUDY GUIDE.

DATE: ? I'm [illegible]olable'

NAME: Bobbie Drip

(GENGHIS HEARTS BEARDS)

F

See me after class!

1. Describe the events and socio-economic factors that led to the American Civil War.

Genghis Khan invaded his neighbor America in 1832 to forestall its then burgeoning space program. Though this had the intended effect of diverting resources from the American space program to fend off the invasion, the Khan had failed to leave a substantial defense force at home. Thus, Ancient Egypt was able to levy its air superiority through jet technology to overtake the Khan's Kingdom

The growing concern of external threats led to a breakdown in American society. After nearly a thousand years of totalitarian rule, the American government was unable to quell rebellions throughout.

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION IV BEYOND THE SWORD
The 2005 PC Game of the Year just became **more** epic.
Find out more at www.civilization.com.
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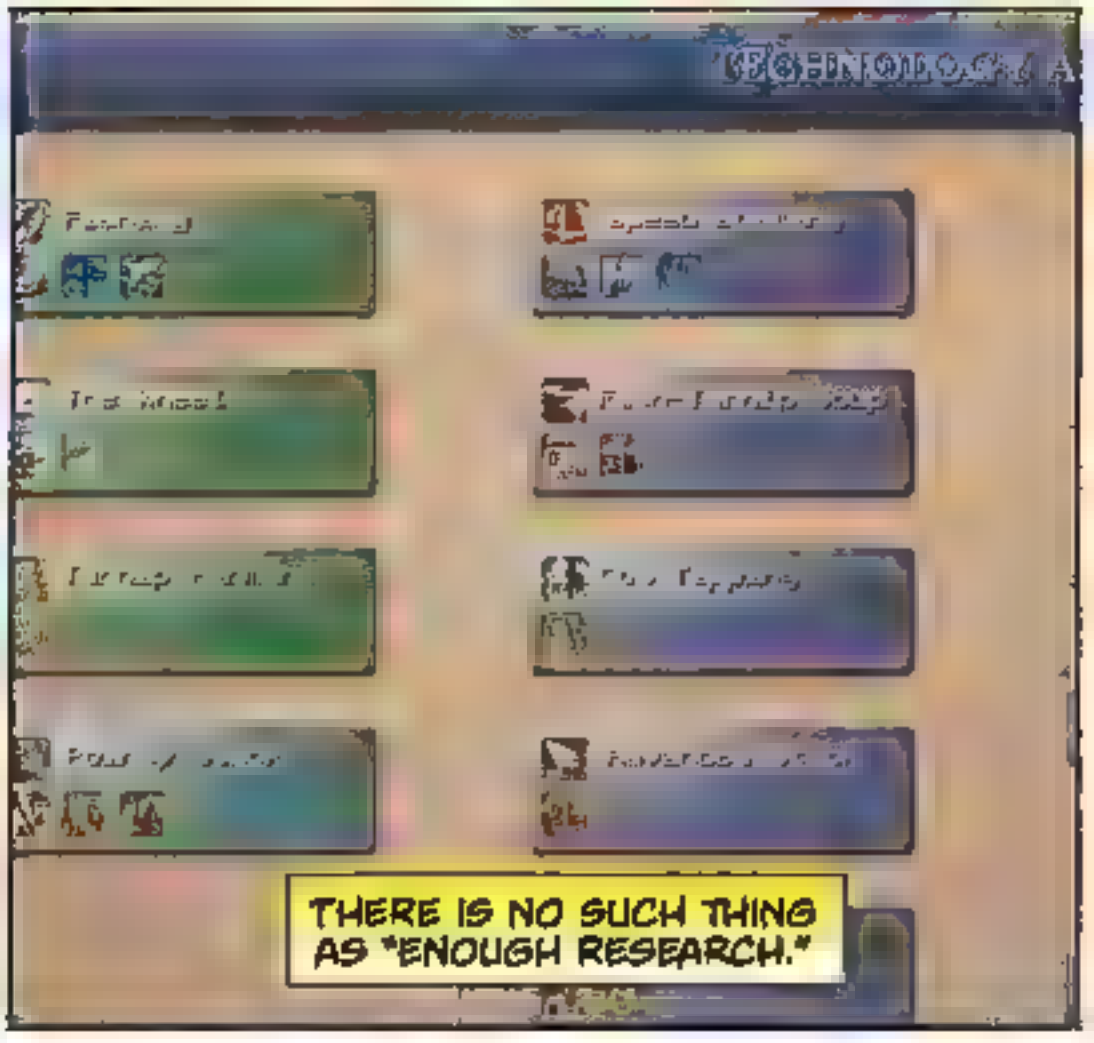

CIVILIZATION IV BEYOND THE SWORD

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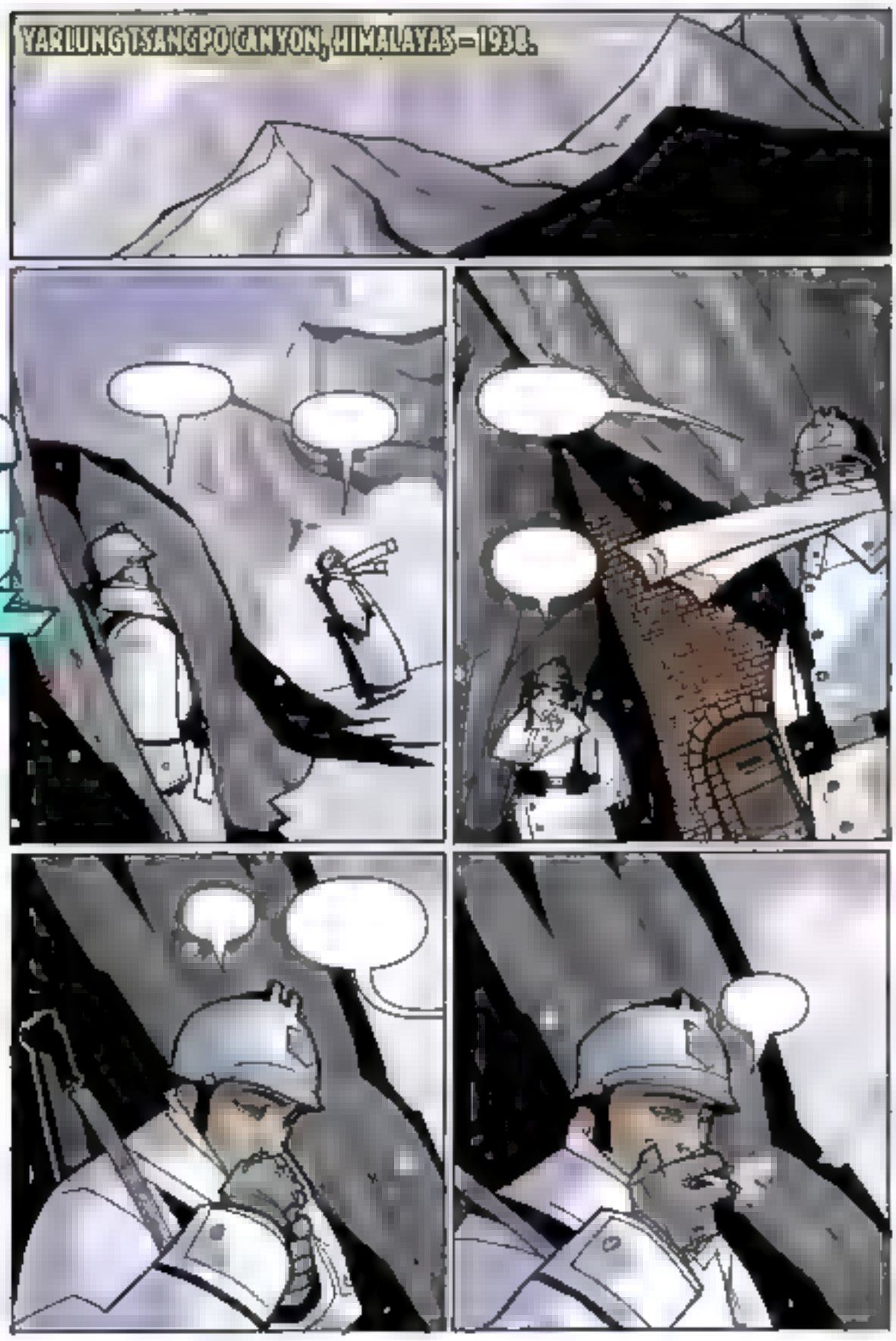
PENCILS

INKS

COLOR!



FIRST, I WILL MURDER HIM, THEN I WILL *KILL* HIM.

THEN? *THEN* I'LL GO TO WORK ON HIM.

WHAT IS IT THIS TIME? DID FIGHTER SAY, DO, OR LOOK AT SOMETHING?

I'LL TELL YOU WHAT HE DID!

YES, I ASKED

WHITE MAGE KISSED HIM!

A) THAT'S NOT SOMETHING *HE* DID

AND, B) IF THIS IS THE START OF SOME SOAP OPERA HORSESHIT, I WILL GLADLY CUT OUT YOUR EYES.

WHITE MAGE KISSED HIM!

Y'KNOW, I SAW THE WHOLE THING. THERE WAS A CERTAIN SISTERLY QUALITY

IT WAS A BORDERLINE OLD AUNT FOREHEAD PECK, REALLY

YOU'RE GETTING WORKED UP OVER NOTHING AT ALL.

I'M *NOT* WORKED UP I'M MURDEROUS. *COMPLETELY* DIFFERENT

ALSO, IT'S MY BASELINE ATTITUDE.

UH-HUH. SO WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOUR *FACE*, THEN?

NOTHING!

HE MEANS WHAT *ELSE* IS WRONG.

OH, THIS? NOTHING, IT'S JUST MY NEW LOOK. THIS IS HOW I LOOK NOW *IT'S FINE.*

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I'M JUST SO MAD, I COULD..

I COULD..

I COULD..

TINKLE!

EXCUSE ME.

OKAY, WHAT'S WORSE? THAT ANGER MAKES HIM URINATE, OR THAT HE CALLS IT *TINKLE*?

WITH BLACK MAGE, IT'S REALLY A MENAGERIE OF HORRORS.

I CAN'T EVEN KEEP TRACK ANY MORE.

DIE, ANTS, DIE!

IS HE..

HE LIKES TO HAVE VICTIMS.

IT MUST TAKE A *TREMENDOUS* AMOUNT OF ENERGY TO BE THAT UNNECESSARILY *CREEPY*

I KILLED THINGS. I FEEL BETTER.

BIG DEAL, THEY WERE BUGS.

PUTTING THEM ON YOUR LEVEL, YES.

JUST PROMISE TO MURDER ME WITH YOUR PANTS ON.

I PROMISE *NOTHING*.

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FIGHTER, A QUESTION, IF I MAY

GO NUTS!

WHAT IS IT EXACTLY THAT YOU SAID TO WHITE MAGE TO MAKE HER TURN?

UH, BACK, THAT IS.

WEL...

WHAT HE THINKS HE SAID

THIS IS MY INSPIRATIONAL SPEECH. IT IS VERY INSPIRING.

YOU HAVE INSPIRED ME WITH YOUR SPEECH, OH FIGHTER.

THAT COMES AS NO SURPRISE. IT WAS INSPIRING.

WHAT HE ACTUALLY SAID

OKAY, SO YOU'RE REALLY NOT A VERY GOOD HEALER. WE ALL KNOW THAT, THOUGH PERHAPS NOT AS WELL AS THOSE YOU'VE CHOSEN TO "HELP."

BUT YOU'RE EVEN WORSE AT BEING EVIL!

I MEAN, C'MON. THE BEST YOU COULD DO WAS CALL ME KINDA DUMB.

WHICH EVERYONE KNOWS IS SILLY

I THINK MY NEW LIFE-ALTERING DECISION IS TO NOT MAKE LIFE-ALTERING DECISIONS BASED ON THE THINGS YOU SAY

WHAT HE TELLS RED MAGE HE SAID..

BASICALLY--

SORRY, YOU'RE BOTH REDDISH BLOBS WITH MY EYES LIKE THIS.

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IT LOOKS LIKE WE NEED A LITTLE ASSISTANCE, WHITE MAGE. AGAIN.

WHAT DO YOU...AH

YOU KNOW, IT WOULD BE A *LOT* EASIER FOR YOU GUYS TO SAVE THE WORLD WERE IT NOT FOR--ARE YOU *LAUGHING?* HEH HEH

SORRY

AHEM

SORRY I WAS, UH, I JUST REMEMBERED SOMETHING FUNNY SOMEONE SAID EARLIER

"SAVE THE WORLD" PFSNX.

EXCUSE ME?

AHEM HM?

YOU MADE A NOISE

DID I?

LIKE A SNORT

OR A LAUGH

COULD HAVE BEEN CLEARING MY THROAT OR MAYBE MY ALLERGIES FLARED UP A BIT

YOU HAVE ALLERGIES?

INSOFAR AS THIS CONVERSATION IS CONCERNED, YES, YES, I HAVE ALLERGIES LIKE A BASTARD

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SO LAME.

FIGHTER GOT A KISS FROM WHITE MAGE ***JUST BECAUSE*** HE'S NOT A HORRIBLE HUMAN BEING.

AT LEAST I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT FRUIT CAKE AND TWINKLE-TOES HORNING IN ON 'ER.

AND WHAT IS THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

Y'KNOW.

'CAUSE YOU DRESS LIKE A LADY AND HE'S AN ELF

I LIKE GIRLS!

JUST NOT WHITE MAGE.

FRANKLY, SHE SCARES ME A LITTLE

I COULD NOT POSSIBLY GIVE LESS OF A DAMN ABOUT ANY OF THIS IF YOU PAID ME.

BECAUSE SHE'S A HUMAN?

NO, OR RATHER, YES.

BUT ALSO BECAUSE I'M MARRIED

SINCE WHEN?

PROXIMITY

A COUPLE HUNDRED YEARS BEFORE YOU WERE BORN.

WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL US ABOUT THIS BEFORE, THIEF?

Y'KNOW HOW YOU DON'T GET FAMILIAR WITH THE ANIMALS YOU RAISE FOR SLAUGHTER?

SURE

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ARGH, I CAN'T EVEN LOOK AT YOU!

SURE Y'CAN. YOU'RE DOING IT RIGHT NOW.

YOU'RE HOLDING YOUR EYE KINDA FUNNY IS THAT WHAT'S WRONG?

NO! WHAT'S ***WRONG*** IS THAT YOU WERE MACKIN' ON MY GIRL!

IT MAKES ME WANT TO CUT YOU OPEN LIKE, LIKE. WELL. LIKE USUAL. BUT MAYBE I'D DO IT TWICE.

I DON'T ***REMEMBER*** ANY "MACKIN'"

OH, NO. YOU'RE NOT USING THE OLD "DUR, I'M THE FIGHTER, IT'S A MIRACLE I REMEMBER TO BREATHE, DUR." EXCUSE.

YEAH, I'M SURE THE SEVERE HEAD TRAUMA HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT.

HEAD TRAUMA, EH?

FIGHTER, COME WITH ME

THAT SOUNDS REASONABLE!

IT'D BE NICE IF WE STARTED LOOKING FOR THAT ORB. THERE'S NOT MUCH PROFIT TO BE HAD AROUND HERE.

I THINK IT'S THE LACK OF CIVILIZATION.

REALLY? YOU THINK THAT'S IT, HM? THE WASTELAND? YOU THINK ***DESOLATION*** MIGHT HURT THE ECONOMY AROUND HERE?

YEAH.

PLUS, EVERYONE'S DEAD

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THIS IS SO SIMPLE, IT'S GENIUS.

I CAN'T SEEM TO KIL.. THE BASTARD, SO I'LL JUST DAMAGE HIS BRAIN UNTIL HE FORGETS WHO I AM.

[redacted] SHOULD HAVE BROUGHT MORE THAN THE ONE KNIFE..

WHAT WAS THAT? I CAN'T HEAR YOU OVER THE INTERNAL [redacted].

SWARSHUM!

YOU DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT INTERNAL BLEEDING—

YOU LET ME WORRY ABOUT—

KILLING YOU WITH MAGIC!

LET THAT BE A LESSON TO YOU.

CROSS ME, AND YOUR BRAIN EXPLODES. GOT IT?

WHATEVER YOU'RE BABBLING ABOUT THIS TIME, IT'S OBVIOUS YOU'RE BLUFFING

IS IT?

YEAH.

HELLO, COMPATRIOTS. THE SQUARE OF THE HYPOTENUSE IS EQUAL TO THE SUM OF THE SQUARES OF THE OTHER TWO SIDES.

FIGHTER? HOW DO YOU FEEL?

I FEEL.. CRYSTAL CLEAR.

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$$\nabla_a(X^b + Y^b) = \nabla_a X^b + \nabla_a Y^b$$

I THINK YOU **STABBED** THE STUPID OUT OF HIM.

THAT MAKES NO SCIENTIFIC SENSE.

THE KNIFE CHANNELED THE LIGHTNING DIRECTLY TO HIS BRAIN WHICH THEN EXPERIENCED ELECTRICAL ACTIVITY FOR, PERHAPS, THE FIRST TIME EVER.

YEAH, GIVEN THE EVIDENCE, THAT'S THE ONLY THING THAT MAKES SENSE.

OH NO WE DON'T WE'RE NOT DOING THIS AGAIN.

DOING **WHAT** AGAIN, EXACTLY?

THIS. THIS WHOLE THING.

WHITE MAGE HAD A COMPLETE CHANGE IN PERSONALITY JUST LONG ENOUGH TO PISS ME OFF WHEN SHE WENT BACK TO NORMAL.

SHE WAS EVIL UNTIL "OH NO, I FORGOT, REALLY I'M GOOD, HA HA, THE BLACK MAGE SUCKS, HA HA."

SAME THING'S HAPPENING HERE.

THIS A WASTE OF OUR TIME

HE'S NOT **REALLY** SMART NOW BECAUSE HE **WON'T** BE SMART TEN MINUTES FROM NOW, SO THERE WAS **NO REASON** FOR HIM TO BE SMART NOW.

[redacted], HE TALKS TOO MUCH IN "SMART" MODE.

$$\nabla_a(X^b Y^c) = Y^c \nabla_a X^b + X^b \nabla_a Y^c$$

I KNOW WHERE TO FIND THE AIR—

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I KNOW WHERE TO FIND THE AIR

GLRZKL!

GLURZKEL, EH? I'VE NEVER BEEN THERE OR HEARD OF IT BEFORE, BUT CHANCES ARE I KNOW EXACTLY WHERE IT IS!

OH, DO TEL...

IT'S IN THE WORLD. PROBABLY ABOVE GROUND. OR, FAILING THAT, *UNDER* IT

WHAT WOULD WE DO WITHOUT YOU, [illegible]

[illegible] SHRIVEL UP AND DIE.

OR HIM?

HEY, SO... HOW 'BOUT THAT FIGHTER?

SUDDENLY A GENIUS, BUT STILL SO CLUMSY HE FELL ONTO THE KNIFE I INNOCENTLY THREW AT HIM.

I BET HE HAD NO IDEA WHAT HE WAS TALKING ABOUT

SO THERE'S NO NEED TO PUNCH ME!

COUNTERPOINT!

THAT'S A GOOD POINT

YOU'RE VERY *PERSUASIVE*.

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OH, COME ON I JUST FIXED THIS.

FIGHTER'S CLUMSY, EVERYONE KNOWS IT

CASE IN POINT, OUT OF ALL THE KNIVES IN THE WORLD, HE HAD TO FALL ONTO THE ONLY ONE BEING THROWN.

HOW DOES THAT PROVE ANY-THING?

THAT SHOULD KEEP HIM BUSY FOR A BIT

THANKS TO MY **SUPERHUMAN INTELLIGENCE**, I COMPART-MENTALIZED MY INTELLECT INTO A PART OF MY BRAIN THAT WAS UNAFFECTED BY BLACK MAGE'S WHOLLY UNWARRANTED ATTACK.

IT'S QUITE UNFORTUNATE IT WAS THE PART WHERE I KEEP MY SWORD FIGHTING.

SO THERE WAS, LIKE, THIS BIG TRIPPY BATTLE OF WARRING MIND-SCAPES.

TURNS OUT FANCY EQUATIONS DON'T LAST VERY LONG AGAINST AN EIGHT-FOLD CUTTING SWAN SWORD TECHNIQUE

NOT EVEN IN YOUR STANDARD 4-D STERANKOVERSE ARENA?

MAN, THAT JUST MADE IT IT WORSE

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FWAM!

SON OF A.

WHAT KIND OF IDIOT PUTS A TOWER *RIGHT WHERE* I'LL RUN INTO IT SOME DAYZ

CHOOM!

OH, MAN, AM I GLAD TO SEE YOU!

WHYYYYY...

WOULD YOU LIKE TO JOIN US, WHITE MAGE? WITH BLACK MAGE AWOL, WE NEED A FOURTH MAN.

LOOSELY SPEAKING, OF COURSE

I WISH THAT I COULD, BUT IT ISN'T MY PLACE.

IT WAS NOT MY FATE TO BE A WARRIOR OF LIGHT.

DESTINY WILL GUIDE YOU BACK TO BLACK MAGE.

ADMITTEDLY FOR REASONS THAT ARE, UH, DIFFICULT TO DISCERN

I JUST BLAME RED MAGE

WAIT, HOW'S THAT WORK?

VERY WELL, THANK YOU.

WOW I DOVE RIGHT *IN* TO THAT ONE

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IT'S BEEN A ***WHILE*** SINCE I HAD VISITORS WAY UP HERE.

I MEAN, SURE, THERE WAS THAT ***TIDAL WAVE***, BUT THAT HARDLY COUNTS.

ALL THOSE POOR, ***POOR*** FOOLS NOT LIVING IN TOWERS OR BEING ABLE TO LEAP INTO THE STRATOSPHERE IT'S LIKE THEY WANTED TO DROWN.

BUT, HEY ENOUGH OF THAT, RIGHT?

I'LL MAKE US SOME TEA. OR COFFE, IF YOU'D RATHER. I'M GOOD EITHER WAY

WE'VE BEEN WALKING AROUND FOR AN HOUR, AND STILL NO SIGN OF BLACK MAGE!

THAT'S NOT A BAD THING,

I JUST WORRY ABOUT THE LITTLE GUY THE WILDERNESS IS SUCH A BIG SCARY PLACE AND HE'S DEFENSELESS. AND PLUMP.

I BET HE'S NOT IN ***OR*** NEAR THE ONLY STRUCTURE IN VIEW THAT'S STILL STANDING.

THAT ***DOES*** STRIKE ME AS A LITTLE TOO SMART FOR HIM, YEAH.

BUT, ***MORE*** IMPORTANTLY, OLD TOWERS HAVE ***THE*** BEST KINDS OF TREASURE

SHINY?

POWERFUL?

NO. THE FREE KIND. ***AND*** THE KIND THAT BECOMES FREE AFTER SOME VIOLENCE.

DRINK! A HOT BEVERAGE IS THE LEAST I CAN DO AFTER ALL YOUR HELP.

COME ON.

GIVE ME A ***CHANCE*** TO REPAY YOU WITH SOME OL' HOSPITALITY

IS IT THE SPEAR? IS THAT A PROBLEM?

A LITTLE BIT

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OH, LORD

SARA, DARLING! DON'T WORRY, YOU ARE NOT ACTUALLY SEEING DOUBLE.

THANKS FOR THE TIP, DAD

YOU CAN EASILY TELL US APART BECAUSE I AM WEARING MY SHIRT.

THAT'S SUPER

CAN I ASK YOU WHY?

IT WOULD BE UNKINDLY OF ME TO GO AROUND WITHOUT MY ROYAL VESTMENTS.

THE PICTURE!

WHY THE PICTURE?

WE OWE IT TO FUTURE GENERATIONS TO RESTORE ANCIENT MASTERPIECES.

LIKE AN ANCIENT MASTER-PIECE PORTRAYING YOUR MIRACULOUS BIRTH?

TURNS OUT THEY ALL DO!

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RUINING PRICELESS WORKS OF ART *SHOULD* DISTRACT HIM LONG ENOUGH FOR ME TO GET *SOME* WORK DONE.

MESSENGER!

M'LADY!

TAKE THIS NOTE TO OUR GENERALS. I TIRE OF FATHER'S WAR WITH THE ELVES.

PRINCESS?

I'VE OUTLINED A THREE-STEP PROCESS TO VICTORY. DELIVER IT

BUT SURELY SENDING A DOCUMENT OF SUCH IMPORT UNGUARDED WILL—

—BE COMPLETELY IGNORED BY THE ELVES.

NOW GO!

OH, ELITE GUARD HANK? MAKE SURE HE'S CAPTURED

UH... WHY?

BECAUSE IT'S A RUSE

THE ELVES WILL COMMIT THEIR TROOPS TO FINDING A PLACE THAT DOES NOT EXIST, LEADING THEM TO DEFEAT

*I hope the elves don't strike **with their whole army** at Owa'Tinnas Siam.*

Love,

King Steve

NOW TO FIGURE OUT A NEW ECONOMIC MODEL THAT DOESN'T RELY ON WAR

ROYAL ACCOUNTANTS, TO ME!

TODAY'S THE DAY THAT JUST KEEPS ON GIVING.

SO, ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER ILL-CONCEIVED FAILURE OF A PLAN.

I DO NOT KNOW WHAT YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT.

MY LACK OF CONTRACTIONS SIGNIFIES THE TELLING OF A THOUSAND TRUTHS.

WE ARE LEGITIMATE ACCOUNTING AGENTS.

RIGHT

CAN WE SKIP STRAIGHT TO THE PART WHERE YOU GUYS GET KICKED OUT OF THE CASTLE AND THE GOTH ONE CRIES ON THE WAY BACK TO YOUR LITTLE CLUBHOUSE?

I'VE GOT A KINGDOM TO RUN.

WE BE HIRED BY THE KING HIS SELF. YARRR.

HOW?

EARLIER...

YES, KING LENGTH OF STRING, I THOUGHT SO AS WELL. YES.

ALSO..

SNIP!

NOW, HOW TO *ACCOUNT* FOR MYSELF TO DEFLECT SUSPICION...

AND SO HE HIRED US RIGHT AFTER *NOT* KILLING THE STRING.

WELL..

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CAN I GET ANYONE ANYTHING? A SCONE?

OH, UH, I COULD USE A DASH OF SUGAR, ACTUALLY

HA. OF COURSE, WHERE ARE MY MANNERS TODAY?

SARDA TOLD US THE AIR ORB WAS LOCATED IN "A TOWER" AND THEN DUMPED US IN THIS WASTELAND WHERE NOTHING BUT *A TOWER* IS STILL LEFT STAND-ING.

IT CANNOT BE A COINCIDENCE THAT WE ARE HERE, NOW, IN THAT VERY TOWER!

OR, LOOKING AT IT FROM ANOTHER ANGLE, THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT A COINCIDENCE IS.

YOU JUST HAVE TO RAIN ALL OVER MY PARADE, DON'T YOU?

KHOOM!

HERE YOU ARE.

ER, *SALT* YES. I, UM, REQUIRE SALT.

FOR TEA?

OLD ELF TRADITION OR SOMETHING, SURE.

WONDER WHY HE KEEPS ALL THAT STUFF ON THE TOP SHELF.

WHEN YOU CAN JUMP LIKE THAT, WHAT'S IT MATTER?

DEAR GODS, STOP MAKING HIM JUMP.

KHOOM!

HOW ABOUT CINNAMON?

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AH, CHIEF ROYAL ACCOUNTANT GARLAND.

HOW'S THE NEW ECONOMY COMING?

- TO BE HONEST, THERE HAVE BEEN SOME... COMPLICATIONS, ACTUALLY.

HM, HOW UNFORTUNATE. EXPLAIN.

THERE'S... DISSENT.

FOR THE LAST TIME, I BE *TELLIN'* YE THAT I ONLY WORKS IN THE BASE SIX WHAT DUE TO ME HOOKED HAND

THERE IS NO HOOK HAND AND THERE NEVER WAS, BIKKE.

CAST YE MUTINOUS EYES 'PON *THIS* DREAD SIGHT YAR

OKAY, WHO GAVE HIM THAT?

DRIZZLE

NO, I'M THE SMART ONE.

I MADE IT PROPS HELP TO BRING *FOCUS* TO A GAME

YE DON'T BE KNOWIN' IT, BUT I BE GIVIN' YE THE PIRATE'S ONE HOOK SALUTE.

LOOK AT ALL THAT FOCUS.

UM, MR. DRAGOON? A QUESTION OCCURS.

YOU CAN JUMP VERY HIGH, BUT WHY IS IT YOU ALWAYS LAND ON SOMEONE?

GROOM!

WELL, HOW *ELSE* SHOULD I DO IT?

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OKAY, SO YOUR JUMP IS ACTUALLY AN ATTACK?

OH, HECK YEAH IT IS!

CHOOM!

SEE?

FASCINATING.

AND LOGICAL, TOO!

COULD YOU MAYBE TRY TO JUMP WITHOUT THE ATTACK?

THAT HARDLY MAKES SENSE.

I MEAN, LOOK.

IT'S JUST SAD LITTLE HOPS, ISN'T IT?

BUT WHAT IF YOU NEED SOMETHING ON THE TOP SHELF AND NO ONE'S AROUND?

THEN I'M UP THE CREEK WITHOUT A TARGET TO JUMP MYSELF TO SHORE, AREN'T I?

WHY DO YOU THINK I WAS SO DELIGHTED TO HAVE VISITORS AGAIN?

AND SINCE FIGHTER IS ARMORED...

...AND THIEF WOULD DODGE, SUE, AND KICK ME...

...AND RED MAGE HAS THE LEAN LOOK OF A DEADLY PREDATOR.

TOTALLY CALLED IT

...I HAVE TO JUMP ON THE LITTLE FAT GUY

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I THINK I KNOW WHAT ROLE BLACK MAGE PLAYS IN THE TEAM.

THE HERALD OF THE END OF ALL THINGS?

URG. MY INNARDS

NO.

AN AVATAR OF DESTRUCTION?

MAYBE IF YOU DIDN'T MISS SO OFTEN...

THE GUY WHO HATES YOU GUYS?

THE GUY I'M GOING TO IGNORE?

NO!

WELL, ALSO YES, BUT NEITHER OF THOSE ARE WHAT I MEANT

HE'S THE GUY WHO'S THERE TO *ACT* TOUGH...

...SO NEW CHARACTERS CAN *WRECK HIM* WHEN THEY'RE INTRO-DUCED...

...THUS PROVING TO THE REST OF US JUST HOW AMAZING THEY ARE!

LIKE WOLVERINE OR WORF.

WHAT IN THE *HELL* DO HORRIBLE RODENTS AND *PIGRS* HAVE TO DO WITH BLACK MAGE?

OTHER THAN THE ODOR.

THAT'S *IT*! REAP THE WHIRL-WIND, ELF.

HEY, FOUND MY *FRISBEE*!

THERE IS *SO MUCH* COOL STUFF UP THERE, IT'S GREAT

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SO...

SO...

GO ON AND ASK HIM.

YEAH, YEAH, I'M GONNA.

OKAY, HOW DO YOU GET YOUR ARMOR TO SHINE LIKE THAT? IT'S KIND OF GLIMMERING.

THAT'S NOT WHAT I WANTED TO ASK.

APPARENTLY?

CORRECT

HOW DO YOU JUMP SO HIGH? IS IT A FEAT OR...?

UH, SHOULD WE HELP HIM?

THE BEST WAY TO HELP HIM IS TO LET HIM BE.

AND IN THE MEANTIME, YOU CAN TELL ME WHERE YOU KEEP THE ORB OF AIR.

DUN DUN, DUNNNN?

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WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I HAVE THE ORB OF AIR?

CERTAIN *EVIDENCES* REGARDING A TOWER AND THIS BEING A TOWER.

AND YOU CAN JUMP REALLY HIGH. IT DOESN'T TAKE A ROCKET SCIENTIST TO PUT TWO AND TWO TOGETHER.

FIVE!

BUT ONLY FOR EXTREMELY HIGH VALUES OF TWO.

WELL, I ADMIT THIS *IS* A TOWER AND I *CAN* JUMP HIGH...

AH-*HA*! SO YOU ADMIT TO HAVING THE AIR ORB!

NO, I ADMITTED TO THE THINGS THAT ARE *TRUE*. MAYBE YOU'RE CONFUSED

AND THAT'S PRECISELY WHAT YOU'D SAY IF IT *WERE* TRUE!

MAYBE *I'M* CONFUSED...

WAIT, HOW DO *YOU* KNOW ABOUT THE ORB OF AIR?

MORE TO THE POINT, HOW DO *YOU*?

UM, I'D *RATHER* SPEAK WITH SOMEONE ELSE IF THAT'S AT ALL POSSIBLE.

WE NEED IT FOR HERO STUFF.

THINK I COULD BORROW IT ONCE YOU'RE DONE HEROING WITH IT?

WHAT FOR?

TO REBUILD THE SACRED AND ELITE ORDER OF DRAGON KNIGHTS OF WHICH I AM THE LAST.

COOL! I'M THE SOLE SURVIVOR OF AN ANCIENT SECT TOO!

LET'S GO TRADE STORIES OF ISOLATION AND LOSS!

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OH, HE'S GOT THE ORB I CAN SMELL IT.

NO, THAT'S JUST AIR. IT SMELLS LIKE AIR.

HE DOESN'T HAVE THE ORB.

OF COURSE HE DOES.

THEN WHERE IS IT?

IF YOU'D TURN AROUND, I COULD PLANT SOME EVIDENCE.

OR... I DON'T KNOW. YOU KNOW. IT'S, ER, UP!

"UP."

HE MUST HAVE IT!

BECAUSE OF ALL THE JUMPING?

OH, YOU JUST DON'T WANT HIM TO HAVE THE ORB BECAUSE YOU HAVE A RAGING MAGE-BONER FOR YOUR NEW BEST FRIEND.

DO NOT!

AS FAR AS YOU KNOW

THINK IT THROUGH. HOW ELSE CAN HE JUMP LIKE THAT?

WELL, ACTUALLY...

SQUATS.

OH, THAT MAKES SENSE.

SURE. HE DOES SQUATS. HE DOES TEN THOUSAND SQUATS EVERY SINGLE DAY

AND EIGHT THOUSAND IN HIS SLEEP.

IF I COULD INTERJECT, I

MAYBE HE HAS SPRINGS FOR FEET

WE MIGHT HAVE TO AMPUTATE...

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THE SECRET OF MY JUMPING TECHNIQUE IS AN ANCIENT TECHNIQUE. ALSO, A SECRET

SEE? THAT EXPLAINS ITSELF!

OR, ALTERNATELY, IT DOESN'T EXPLAIN A GODDAMNED THING.

NO, NOT *ACTUALLY* BUT DETAILS AREN'T IMPORTANT

COULD BE AN ANCIENT PACT MADE WITH SPIRITS OF THE AIR.

NOPE!

NO, WAIT, THAT'S IT *EXACTLY*

IN AN AGE LONG PAST, A HORRIBLE RACE OF EVIL POINTY-EARED JERKS RULED ALL THE WORLD WITH THEIR ARMY OF DRAGONS.

THEY SOUND SYMPATHETIC. AND *HANDSOME.*

NO ONE COULD OPPOSE THEM. NO ONE UNTIL A TRUE WARRIOR--

BESOUGHT THE VERY SPIRITS OF THE AIR, YADDA YADDA, NOW THE JUMPING.

SKIPPING THE EPIC HISTORY PARTS, YES, THAT'S ACCURATE.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? WHY ARE YOU THE LAST?

JUMPING A THOUSAND FEET INTO THE AIR TO PUT A SPEAR THROUGH THE THROAT OF A DRAGON ISN'T AS SAFE AS IT SOUNDS.

SURE, ETHEREAL FORCES GUIDE YOU UNERRINGLY TO YOUR TARGET, BUT DRAGONS HAVE CLAWS, FIRE, AND A LOT OF EVIL.

NO WAY, A DRAGON GAVE US SUPERPOWERS. IT'S GREAT!

WHICH DRAGON?

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FIGHTER, WHEN YOU TALK TO A GUY WHO *HATES* DRAGONS, YOU SHOULDN'T TELL HIM HOW COOL *YOU* THINK DRAGONS ARE.

SHOULDN'T YOU INVENT A REASON FOR ME TO JUMP AWAY SO YOU THINK I CAN'T HEAR WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?

I LIKE IT BETTER WHEN THE PEOPLE WE MEET ARE DUMBER THAN WE ARE.

YEAH, THAT'S...I *PREFER* THAT

BESIDES, I DON'T *HATE* DRAGONS.

I JUST BELIEVE THEY'RE A BLIGHT UPON THE EARTH.

AND FIGHTER WAS KIDDING ANY-WAY

IT WAS BAHAMUT, THE GOD-KING OF DRAGONS.

GOOD, *GOOD*. EVERYTHING IS FALLING APART SO *COMPLETELY* THAT'S GOOD.

BAHAMUT?

BAHAMUT!

NEVER HEARD OF HIM.

GOD-KING, THOUGH? THAT'S A SWEET GIG.

DO YOU INTERVIEW FOR THAT...?

COULD BE APPOINTED BY COMMITTEE.

Y'KNOW, YOU'RE PROB-ABLY...

I BET YOU HAVE TO BE *BORN* IN-TO IT

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DID ANY-ONE WANT TO HEAR THE EPIC TALE OF HOW I CAME TO BE THE LAST OF THE NOBLE RED MAGES?

SO FAR, SOUNDS LIKE YOU *BORED* THEM TO DEATH.

BLACK MAGE WOULDVE LAUGHED AT THAT IF HE WAS STILL ALIVE.

OH, HAVE I KILLED? *AGAIN*? I THOUGHT HE WAS *NAPPING*.

WITH YOU STANDING ON HIS SPINE?

HM, YOU HAVE A POINT I'LL JUST HOP OFF THEN.

THIS *COULD* BE A PROBLEM FOR US.

IF HE LANDS ON FIGHTER IT WILL *SPECIFICALLY* NOT BE A PROBLEM FOR US.

CHOOM!

HUH.

Y'KNOW IF YOU VAPORIZED HIM, YOU GET TO TAKE HIS PLACE. IT'S IN THE CONTRACT

CHOOM!

OKAY...

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WELL, THIS IS JUST GREAT

WHAT, *YOU* AGAIN? WHAT DO YOU DO, LOOK FOR WAYS TO GET YOURSELF KILLED?

HEY. WHAT I DO IN MY SPARE TIME TO GET BACK INTO HELL IS NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS.

THAT WOULD BE ILL-ADVISED. WE'VE INVESTED TOO MUCH INTO YOUR PROGRESS TO ALLOW A DETOUR OF THAT [illegible].

I MEAN, TRANSFER OF OWNERSHIP OVER THE NINE REALMS OF ULTIMATE DAMNATION. YOU CAN'T BEGIN TO IMAGINE THE PAPERWORK THAT INVOLVES.

SO STICK TO YOUR MYSTERIOUS EVIL DESTINY.

OKAY. SPEAKING OF WHICH, *WHAT* IS IT?

NOT VERY MYSTERIOUS IF I *TOLD* YOU, DUH.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT ELSE I COULD HAVE EXPECTED YOU TO SAY.

WOW, OKAY. DID THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE TURN INTO PURE FOCUSED AGONY FOR YOU, OR WAS IT JUST ME?

NO, THAT WAS YOU.

WHAT *WOULD DO* THAT?

JUST A FEW MORE JUMPS. MAKE IT A NICE ROUND FIVE.

MAYBE TEN.

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GET OFFA ME!

HEY! HOW'D YOU LIVE?

SPITE!

NOW, IF JUMPIN' JACK ASS AND RED MORON ARE DONE, WE DO HAVE A QUEST TO FINISH UP HERE.

SINCE WHEN DO YOU CARE ABOUT QUESTS?

SINCE IT'S A CONVENIENT EXCUSE TO BUTCHER SIR HOPSALOT FOR REVENGE.

YOU MEAN RED MAGE OR ME?

YES.

AS I TOLD YOUR COMRADES, I DO NOT HAVE THE ORB OF AIR.

Y'KNOW, THAT'S THE KIND OF DETAIL I'M PREPARED TO WORK OUT AFTER YOU DIE.

I USED TO HAVE IT. BUT THEN IT GOT KINDA LOST.

OR SLIGHTLY STOLEN. I WAS NEVER EXACTLY CLEAR ON THAT

I KNEW THIS WAS THE TOWER!

GREAT, LET'S GUT THE JERK!

BUT I DON'T HAVE THE ORB.

DON'T CARE. GONNA GUT YA.

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YOU ACTUALLY HAD THE ORB OF AIR, ONLY NOW IT'S GONE AND YOU DON'T KNOW WHY?

YOU CAN CALL ME CRAZY, BUT SOMETHING LIKE ONE OF THE FOUR PILLARS UPON WHICH THE WORLD DEPENDS FOR SURIVAL IS SOMETHING I'D, Y'KNOW, KEEP *TABS* ON.

IT'S NOT A PILLAR. IT'S AN *ORB*. THAT'S LIKE A BALL.

THANKS, FIGHTER. JUST THANKS.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO TELL YOU.

ONE MINUTE THERE WERE THESE DOOR-TO-DOOR *DOOR* SALESMEN, AND THEN--

WAIT WHAT?

I'M AFRAID I *ALREADY* HAVE ALL THE DOORS I REQUIRE.

MAYBE Y'DO, MAYBE Y'DON'T

MAYBE WE COULD CHECK.

STARTING WITH ANY DOORS YOU MIGHT HAVE THAT LEAD TO AN ORB ROOM.

HM, *YOU'RE* THE EXPERTS.

AND THEN THE ORB WENT MISSING?

THERE-ABOUTS.

THE *OLD* DOOR-TO-DOOR *DOOR* SALESMAN SCAM.

THEY'RE GOOD. *THIEF* GOOD.

IT'S THE SCAM I'D USE OR ADVISE OTHERS TO USE.

WE MAY BE DEALING WITH A BAND OF GENIUS... GENIUSESES...SMART GUYS.

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IF ONLY WE KNEW WHO TOOK THE ORB OF AIR.

AH-HA! THIS SOUNDS LIKE A JOB FOR ENCYCLOPEDIA FIGHTER!

DIDN'T I JUST STAB YOU?

YEAH, I WAS PRETENDING.

WELL, PRETEND THIS!

SKRAKOOM!

WANNA HELP LOOK FOR CLUES?

DID GETTING SKEWERED THROUGH THE CHEST SOMEHOW (AND NONSENSICALLY) REMOVE MY ALL MY POWERS?

SKOOOOM TWAKKKKOW

THE TROUBLE WITH YOUR LIGHTNING SPELLS MAY BE THAT WE *ARE* IN-DOORS.

THAT'S MUCH TOO LOGICAL TO MATTER.

OKAY, BUT THIS TOWER HAS LIGHTNING RODS.

Y'KNOW, 'CAUSE IT'S TALL.

FINE. EVERYONE SHUT UP, OR SO HELP ME, I WILL REDUCE THIS TOWER TO CINDERS WITH MY BIG FIRE SPELLS!

YEAH, IT'S A STONE TOWER.

IT'S NOT GOING TO BURN.

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I CAN'T SEEM TO FIND ANY CLUES. HOW ABOUT YOU, THIEF?

WELL, MY AMAZING ELVEN MEMORY TELLS ME THAT DRAGOON SAID THEY WERE HERE MONTHS AGO.

SO, MY AMAZING ELVEN COMMON SENSE TELLS ME THERE AREN'T ANY CLUES OUT HERE [illegible].

IT THEN GOES ON TO SAY I KNEW THAT BEFORE COMING OUT HERE, BUT ANYTHING'S BETTER THAN LISTENING TO THE CASTERS.

OKAY, YOUR FIRE AND LIGHTNING ARE OUT

PERHAPS THE FRIGID TOUCH OF ICE COULD BRING HOT DEVASTATION TO THIS TOWER!

THAT'S STUPID. THE ONLY THING AN ICE SPELL IS GOOD FOR IS A PARTY

AND YET I'M SO VERY ALONE.

AWKWARD.

AS THE LAST OF THE ORDER OF THE RED MAGES, THE STING OF ISOLATION HAS BEEN MY EVER-PRESENT FRIEND.

THERE IS NO ONE WHO KNOWS THE TRAGEDY OF MY LONELY FATE. THE LONG, LONG, ***LONG*** TALE OF THAT TRAGEDY.

A TRAGEDY THAT BEGINS A LONG, LONG, ***LONG*** TALE OF BORING MINUTIA AND ANECDOTES THAT GO [illegible].

SO, LET'S GET STARTED, SHALL WE?

SHUT IT, OR THIS WILL HAPPEN TO YOU.

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THIEF HAS A THEORY ABOUT WHO TOOK THE AIR ORB, GUYS.

NO, WHAT I SAID WAS:

THIS IS A BIGGER WASTE OF TIME THAN ALL THE OTHER BIG WASTES OF TIME WE HAVE *EVER* WASTED TIME ON.

RIGHT SO, I THINK THE OTHER WARRIORS TOOK IT

GODS, OF *COURSE* THEY DID. THEY TOLD US AS MUCH.

RIGHT SO, I THINK THE OTHER WARRIORS TOOK IT

OH, *THANK* YOU.

IT WAS PRESSING ON MY HEART.

THIS IS *FOR YOU*, BUT KICKING *HIM* IS EASIER.

SCRITCH SCR

ONE MOMENT, GUYS. THAT'S MUFFIN. SHE'S PROBABLY HUNGRY.

MUFFIN?

MAYBE DRAGOON HAS A DOG. OR A KITTY!

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IT SMELLS *SUSPICIOUSLY* LIKE DRAGON IN HERE.

THOUGHT YOU DIDN'T *BELIEVE* IN DRAGONS.

I SAID IT WAS SUSPICIOUS, DIDN'T I?

OKAY. WOW. GOOD POINT.

TEETH LIKE *DAGGERS*. EYES. ALSO LIKE DAGGERS.

HOW DOES THAT WORK?

PIERCING GAZE?

YOU'RE JUST ON FIRE TODAY!

NOTABLY DAGGER-LIKE SCALES.

I THINK HE'S TALKING ABOUT A SHARK. A *DAGGER* SHARK.

IS THAT— WHAT IS THAT? A SHARK *MADE* OF DAGGERS?

NOT ENTIRELY, *NO*.

I DOUBT THAT DAGGERS COULD ACT AS A VIABLE BLOOD SUBSTITUTE.

EVEN IF THE DAGGERS WERE *REALLY* TINY

Y'KNOW, I THINK THAT'D BE PAINFUL. FROM ALL THE *REALLY* TINY CUTS.

WHY HASN'T BLACK MAGE STABBED YOU IN THE BACK OF THE NECK YET?

I KNOW. RIGHT? HOPE HE'S FEELING OKAY.

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SORRY ABOUT THAT, GUYS.

MUFFIN GETS CRANKY IF I MISS FEEDING TIME.

DRAGON!

THAT'S AN ODD THING TO BLURT

THERE WAS A DRAGON! RIGHT HERE! ALL FULL OF TEETH AND FIRE.

IN THIS ROOM?

THAT MAKES NO SENSE.

A) DRAGONS ARE HUGE, AND B) THEY ARE LARGELY FICTIONAL.

AND PUT YOUR ARMS DOWN!

IT WAS REAL! IT HAD FANGS AND SCALES AND EVERY-THING.

ARE YOU SURE IT WASN'T JUST A VERY TALL LIZARDMAN WITH BAD TEETH?

I'VE SEEN DRAGONS BEFORE, I KNOW ONE WHEN I SEE IT!

IT'D BE EASIER TO BELIEVE YOUR CLAIMS IF THEY WEREN'T REALLY STUPID

MAYBE IT WAS A UNICORN.

LET ME FINISH.

DRESSED UP LIKE A DRAGON.

SHUT.

UP.

Y'KNOW.

THERE'S A SIMPLE WAY TO SOLVE THIS.

OR A LIZARDMAN IN A UNICORN SUIT DISGUISED AS A DRAGON!

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WE CAN ASK MUFFIN IF SHE SAW ANY DRAGONS.

OH, I DON'T LIKE WHERE THIS IS GOING.

WAIT, WAIT, WAIT. I'VE GOT IT.

IT'S A UNICORN DRESSED UP AS A LIZARDMAN DRESSED UP AS A DRAGON.

THAT'S THE LEAST LIKELY THING YOU'VE EVER SAID.

THINK ABOUT IT. WE'VE NEVER SEEN UNICORNS. WHY? THEY'VE GOT SOMETHING TO HIDE.

THEREFORE.

UNICORNS ARE EVIL.

I'M GOING TO CUT OUT YOUR TONGUE FROM THE *NAVEL* IF YOU SAY ANOTHER--

LET'S SETTLE THIS.

MUFFIN, HAVE YOU SEEN ANY DRAGONS LATELY?

NOT A ONE.

THANKS.

DRAGOON, THAT WAS A DRAGON.

WHAT, MUFFIN? SHE'S MY PARROT

YOU'VE NEVER SEEN A DRAGON, HAVE YOU.

NOT AS SUCH, NO.

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THAT WASN'T A BIRD.

OF COURSE SHE'S A BIRD. SHE TOLD ME SO.

YEAH, BIRDS DON'T TALK.

RIGHT, I TOLD YOU: PARROT

THAT DOESN'T...

PARROTS AREN'T...

THEY DON'T *ACTUALLY* TALK. IT'S ALL MIMICRY, NOT REAL CONVER-SATION.

WELL, I CAN TELL YOU THAT MUFFIN IS CONVERSANT ON A WIDE RANGE OF TOPICS.

BECAUSE SHE'S NOT A PARROT!

SHE'S A HUGE LEATHERY EATING MACHINE WITH WINGS. WHAT *ELSE* WOULD SHE BE?

OKAY, I'M GUESSING YOU HAVE NEVER SEEN ANY *PARROTS* EITHER.

NO, NEVER. IF YOU IGNORE THE FIRE PARROT, THE ICE PARROT...

THE ACID PARROT...

THE SWAMP PARROT...

THIEF, I CAN'T TAKE THIS. *KICK* SOMEONE FOR ME.

Y'KNOW, I THOUGHT I'D BE MADDER, BUT IT'S MY OWN FAULT FOR NOT BEING SPECIFIC ENOUGH.

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OH, THE METALLIC PARROTS. AND THE PRISMATIC ONES.

THERE'S A LOT OF THOSE.

THE GREAT HORNED PARROT HATCHLING.

AND THE THUNDER LIZARD.

PARROT.

YOU'VE MADE YOUR POINT.

NOW SHUT UP.

THANK YOU.

DO WE HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

YES! DRAGOON HAS MET A LOT OF PARROTS.

AND I DIDN'T REALIZE HOW MUCH THEY LOOK JUST LIKE DRAGONS.

IT'S GOOD THAT YOU SAY THINGS LIKE THAT FIGHTER. THEY NEVER MAKE ME WANT TO END YOU.

WE'RE BFF!

YES. THAT IS WHAT WE ARE. WE'RE BFF SO HARD IT HURTS.

I THINK IT'S TIME FOR SOME PLATONIC HUGGING!

BY THE TEN THOUSAND GODLESS HORDES, WHERE IS RED MAGE?

YEAH, HE'D WANT IN ON THAT HUG ACTION.

THEN IT'S A REAL SHAME HE'S GOING TO MISS *THAT'S NOT WHAT I WANT HIM FOR!*

HEY, WHAT YOU APES DO IS YOUR OWN BUSINESS.

I WON'T JUDGE.

TO YOUR FACE

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YOU BRING UP A GOOD POINT, THOUGH. WHERE *IS* RED MAGE?

MY GUESS? OUR "GRACIOUS" HOST KIDNAPPED HIM! PROBABLY TO FEED HIM TO THE DRAGON.

I CAN HEAR YOU, Y'KNOW.

DRAGOON WILL LIKELY BARGAIN FOR RED MAGE'S LIFE. THEN HE WILL DOUBLE-CROSS US AND FEED HIM TO THE DRAGON ANYWAY.

THEN, IN A FINAL DOUBLE-CROSS, HE WILL FEED *US* TO THE DRAGON.

WHY GO THROUGH ALL THAT? HE COULD JUST FEED US TO THE DRAGON RIGHT NOW.

POOR, NAIVE, STUPID, PLUMP BLACK [illegible]

I CAN HEAR YOU TOO.

HOW ELSE DO YOU SUGGEST HE DESTROY THE WORLD'S ONLY HOPE FOR SURVIVAL?

IDENTIFY THE REAL HEROES, DELAY THEM, THEN JOIN A BAND OF EASILY DUPED RUBES, BECOME THEIR LEADER, AND TRICK THEM INTO QUESTING ACROSS THE WORLD ONLY TO STAB THEM ALL IN THE BACK AT THE LAST MINUTE?

AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT I WOULD DO.

I SAID "HYPOTHETICALLY" RIGHT?

SOMEWHERE IN THERE?

NO?

WHERE *IS* THAT RED MAGE?

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IT'S NOT GOING TO WORK, DRAGOON.

OKAY.

FOR MY OWN REFERENCE, THOUGH, WHICH THING THAT I'M NOT DOING IS THIS THAT WON'T WORK?

TRYING TO EXTORT MONEY AND TREASURE FROM US SO YOU WON'T FEED RED MAGE TO YOUR EVIL DRAGON.

YOU KNOW *YOU* KICKED HIM IN-TO THE NEXT ROOM.

WE ALL SAW IT

ALLEGEDLY

IT'S A HARD FACT THAT EYE-WITNESS TESTIMONY IS UNRELIABLE AT BEST

THE MIND CONCOCTS ITS OWN STORY OF WHAT "REALLY" HAPPENED EVEN IF IT HAS TO INVENT MEMORIES TO SUPPORT THE MENTAL NARRATIVE.

THE WAY I REMEMBER IT, YOU KIDNAPPED RED MAGE.

AND WHICH LIES AM I MORE LIKELY TO BELIEVE? YOURS OR MINE?

IS EVERY-THING YOU GUYS DO AS UNECESSARILY DUPLICITOUS AS THIS?

NO. THIS IS FAIRLY STRAIGHT-FORWARD.

I HAVEN'T ENACTED *ANY* OF MY NINE CONCURRENT ASSASSINATION PLOTS YET.

I'M SORRY, BUT YOU ACTUALLY THINK ABOUT THOSE THINGS AHEAD OF TIME?

THEY ALWAYS SEEM KIND OF HALF-ASSED.

MAYBE TO THE STUPID UNTRAINED ELF EYE.

Kill Fighter With:

- a knife
- or a stick
- or a cliff
- or invent guns and then use the guns
- or a big spell with five and screaming
- or two knives!

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ALL I WANTED TO DO WAS TALK ABOUT THE TRAGIC STORY OF MY LONELY LIFE AS THE LAST OF THE RED MAGUS.

I MEAN, Y'KNOW, THAT'S CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT RIGHT THERE.

I COULD STOP BEING SO ONE-DIMESIONAL. I COULD REALLY *LIVE!*

TRAGIC STORIES OF BEING THE LAST OF AN ELITE ORDER IS PRETTY DARN ONE-DIMENSIONAL ANYWAY.

WELL, OF COURSE IT IS, BUT YOU GET A GOOD XP OR KUDOS BONUS FOR COMING UP WITH A BACKSTORY.

MINE IS A TALE THAT SWEEPS THROUGH ALL OF HISTORY!

DIDN'T REALLY ASK.

IT BEGINS WITH THE THAUMATIC GENIUS RED MAGUS AND HIS MAD THEORY THAT THE UNIVERSE IS GOVERNED BY [redacted].

HE STARTED A SECRET SOCIETY DEDICATED TO THE ILLUMINATION OF THESE NUMBERS AND THEIR INTERACTIONS.

THEY FOUND MOST OF THE RULES CONCERNED COMBAT AND MAGIC SYSTEMS.

PROBABLY BECAUSE IT'D BE A *REALLY* BORING UNIVERSE WITHOUT THEM.

BUT THE KNOWLEDGE THEY GAINED CAME AT A TERRIBLE PRICE.

THE ORDER'S NUMBERS WERE NEVER HIGH.

PROBABLY BECAUSE THEY HAD THEIR SACRED MEETINGS ON FRIDAY NIGHTS WHEN OTHER MAGES WENT CLUBBING.

MEMBERSHIP DWINDED WITH EVERY GENERATION.

PROBABLY BECAUSE HITTING EACH OTHER WITH SWORDS AND SPELLS TO CALCULATE THEIR EFFECTS IS FATAL.

AND SO, I AM THE LAST OF ORDER OF RED MAGI!

OH, I SEE. YOU *STUPIDED* YOURSELVES INTO EXTINCTION.

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I THINK *EVERYONE* SHOULD WORK UP A UNIQUE BACKGROUND STORY BEFORE THE ADVENTURE STARTS.

YOUR BACKGROUND CAN JUSTIFY UNREALISTIC EQUIPMENT LOAD OUTS.

I KIND OF HOPED THIS CONVERSATION DIED.

THEY HAVE A MILLION USES!

OR AT LEAST SEVERAL.

"WHERE'D YOU GET THAT MASTERWORK SWORD?"

DAD WAS THE GREATEST SWORDSMITH OF HIS AGE!

"OKAY, WHY'S YOUR MELEE SKILL SO HIGH?"

I TRAINED MY WHOLE LIFE TO AVENGE HIS MURDER!

QUICKTIP: TRAGEDY EQUALS DEPTH.

sword by: Davingo

YOU CAN EVEN USE YOUR BACKGROUND TO JUSTIFY CRAZY STUFF THAT COMPLETELY CONTRADICTS IT!

"WHERE DID YOU GET THAT ANCESTRAL DWARVEN FULL PLATE YOU CAN'T EVEN WEAR BECAUSE YOU'RE GODDAMN HUMAN?"

MY DEAD MASTER SWORDSMITH DAD WAS AN ARMORER, ALSO A DWARF.

SECRETS EQUALS DEPTH TOO.

QUICKTIP: LIES *DISGUISED* AS SECRETS ALSO EQUAL DEPTH.

YEAH, I GUESS I'VE GOT ONE OF THOSE BACKGROUNDS TOO.

OH?

TEN THOUSAND YEARS AGO I ESTABLISHED THE DRAGOONISH ORDER TO KILL OFF THE OTHER DRAGONS SO I COULD TAKE ALL THEIR POWER, TREASURE, AND KNOWLEGE.

THEN I SYSTEMATICALLY KILLED THE DRAGOONS SO THEY'D NEVER FIND OUT THEIR GENERATIONS OF WORK TO SAVE HUMANITY FROM EVIL DRAGONS BENEFITED THE MOST EVIL DRAGON IN THE WORLD.

SECRETS, LIES, *AND* TRAGEDY

THE TRIFECTA.

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THERE'S SOME HOLES IN THAT STORY, OF COURSE.

I MEAN, FOR ONE THING, I MET A COUPLE DRAGONS.

WELL, MAYBE I *DIDN'T* KILL EVERY SINGLE DRAGON.

BUT ALL THE *BIG* ONES WERE TAKEN OUT, I CAN ASSURE YO

BAHAMUT.

BAHAMUT WAS NEVER A THREAT.

HE'LL SLUMBER UNTIL THE PROPHECY OF THE ENLIGHTENED WARRIOR IS FULFILLED TO USHER IN THE FINAL DAYS.

HEY, ISN'T IT *GREAT* THAT WE NEVER WOKE HIM UP!

I HAVE TO...I HAVE TO *GO NOT* WARN ANYONE ABOUT ANYTHING.

I DON'T WANT TO ALARM ANYONE, BUT I THINK WE DOOMED ALL CREATION.

WE'RE AHEAD OF *SCHEDULE* OR...?

I THINK WE DID THE BIG BAD WRONG WHEN WE AWAKENED BAHAMUT.

YOU'RE THINKING OF MATOYA.

I AM. *NOW*

Y'KNOW, MATOYA?

GETTIN' *MESSY* WITH BAHAMUT

ANYONE?

I DON'T UNDERSTAND THE REFERENCE.

SCREW YOU GUYS. THAT WAS *GOLD*, AND YOU KNOW IT.

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OKAY, SO YOU OWE US 600 GP IN REPARATIONS FOR THE DEATH OF RED MAGE.

BUT HE'S RIGHT THERE. HE'S DOING FINE.

THAT COULD BE *ANY* IDIOT IN A GOOFY HAT

GUYS, SHUT UP, I HAVE A QUEST UPDATE HERE.

RED MAGE, I CANNOT POSSIBLY TELL YOU HOW MUCH YOU'VE COMPROMISED OUR BARGAINING POSITION.

I COULD KILL HIM.

SERIOUSLY, THE WORLD IS IN PERIL!

THINK ABOUT IT. WE'VE BEEN ON THIS QUEST TO SAVE THE WORLD FROM A DOOM PROPHECIZED AGES AGO.

BUT HAVE YOU NOTICED THAT EVERYWHERE WE GO, THERE'S REALLY NOT THAT MUCH EVIL TO VANQUISH?

BEYOND OURSELVES, I ASSUME.

WE MAY HAVE TRIGGERED A *REAL* PROPHECY OF GLOBAL DOOM WHILE PARADING AROUND.

AND NOW WE ACTUALLY HAVE TO *DO* SOMETHING ABOUT IT

OH, AND DRAGOON, YOUR PET DRAGON IS EVIL.

MUFFIN'S A *DRAGON*?!

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MUFFIN IS A DRAGON.
IT ALL MAKES SENSE NOW.
LIKE, WHEN I'D SAY "POLLY WANT A CRACKER?" SHE'D SAY "NO, MUFFIN WANT TO RIP A KNIGHT IN HALF AND SUCK OUT THE PULP."
AND YOU DIDN'T FIND THAT TO BE ALARMING AT ALL?
I THOUGHT IT WAS SOMETHING SHE PICKED UP FROM THE NEIGHBOR'S KIDS.
THEN THEY WERE FOUND RIPPED IN HALF WITH THEIR PULP SUCKED OUT A FEW MONTHS AGO.
AND THERE'S NOTHING SUSPICIOUS ABOUT THAT
YEAH, I'M SURE KIDS GET RIPPED IN HALF AND HAVE THEIR PULP SUCKED OUT EVERY OTHER DAY.
AROUND HERE THEY DO.
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SO, THERE'S AN EVIL DRAGON IN THE OTHER ROOM. WE HAVE TO KILL IT.
WHAT? WHY? IT'S A DRAGON!
THEY'RE KNOWN TO BE DANGEROUS.
EXACTLY!
AND WE ARE...
HEROES
HOW?!
ACCORDING TO A LOOSE ENOUGH DEFINITION OF "HERO", WE QUALIFY
WELL, MORE OR LESS.
THE POINT IS THAT GOOD DEEDS WERE DONE AND WE WERE NEARBY
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WELL, LOOK, SHE DOESN'T SUSPECT ANYTHING. WE CAN ALL RUSH IN THERE AND SLAY HER FACE OFF.

SHE WON'T KNOW WHAT HIT HER. DRAGONS ARE SLOW LUMBERING BEASTS.

OH, HEAVENS NO.

DRAGONS ARE AS THE *WIND!*

THEY CAN ONLY BE CONSIDERED SLOW IF YOU COMPLETELY IGNORE OBJECTIVE REALITY

DONE! WHO'S WITH ME?

OKAY, I *HATE* SAYING THIS, BUT I THINK RED MAGE HAS A POINT

WITH THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE, WE CAN TAKE THE DRAGON OFF GUARD AND CRIPPLE IT BEFORE IT CAN DO ANYTHING TO US.

THEN IT'S SETTLED!

YUP. SETTLED TO THE MAX.

CHARGE!

DRAGOON, GO FOR THE NECK! THIEF, ACHILLES HEEL, *NOW!* BLACK MAGE, DEATH SPELLS!

I ONLY SAID HE HAD A POINT. *NOT* THAT I ENDORSED FOLLOWING THROUGH ON IT IN ANY WAY.

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WOW.

THIS IS REALLY EXTREMELY AWKWARD.

NOT FOR ME. AT LEAST, NOT AFTER I KILL YOU.

THAT, UH. YEAH, THAT WOULD SOLVE IT ON YOUR END.

I WOULD LIKE TO PROPOSE AN *ALTERNATIVE* THOUGH.

GO ON.

I'LL HAVE TO CONFER WITH MY *ASSOCIATES* FIRST

BUT OF COURSE.

HOLY SHIT, I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT WORKED.

OH, HE LIVED.

OKAY, GUYS, I KIND OF SCREWED UP OUR SURPRISE ATTACK.

THAT'S FINE, A SURPRISED DRAGON CAN KILL US JUST AS INSTANTLY AS A *NON*-SURPRISED ONE.

THANKS FOR THAT, CAPTAIN *SUNSHINE*.

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HEY, I'M THE DRAGON EXPERT. IT'S YOUR FUNERAL IF YOU DON'T WANT MY ADVICE.

WAS THAT BEFORE OR AFTER YOU THOUGHT THE HUGE EVIL DRAGON IN THE NEXT ROOM WAS A PARROT FOR YOUR WHOLE LIFE?

NEITHER. IT WAS *DURING*

OKAY, IN THAT CASE, *SHUT IT!*

WE'LL GO WITH *MY* ATTACK PLAN AS IT'S THE ONLY ONE TO INVOLVE TOTAL VAPORIZATION OF THE TARGET.

THEN I'LL *MIMIC* TO VAPORIZE THE *VAPOR!*

GOD, I'M SO BRILLIANT, IT *HURTS!*

OH, IT'S PAINFUL ALL RIGHT

NOW IF WE CAN GET OUR HANDS ON AN X-MAGIC ACCESSORY OR MATERIA, WE'D REALLY BE IN [illegible].

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS AND I DON'T CARE TO FIND OUT

WELL, BASICAL[illegible] IT'S

NOPE!

FIGHTER, GO SWORD AT THE DRAGON. IT'S EVIL.

YAR!

WON'T HE BE CAUGHT IN THE BLAST?

NO, BUT TECHNICALLY THE DRAGON WILL BE.

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OOF

CAN I HELP YOU?

THAT'S A LONG HALLWAY TO TRY AND JUMP IN ONE GO.

I SUPPOSE TO PEOPLE WHO AREN'T HUGE FLYING MAGIC LIZARDS, YES, IT IS.

WAIT A SECOND

YOU'RE THAT *DRAGON*, I KEEP HEARING ABOUT

PROBABLY.

OKAY, I'MA SLAY YOU NOW, DRAGON!

OH, THAT'D BE AWFUL.

WOULD IT?

I WOULDN'T LIKE IT, I'LL TELL YOU THAT.

HADN'T REALLY THOUGHT OF IT FROM THAT ANGLE...

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THE DRAGON SAID THAT TAKING HER LIFE WOULD BE WRONG.

OH, FOR THE LOVE OF... YOU WOULDN'T, I WOULD

HELL, SHE'D ONLY DIE *INDIRECTLY* FROM MY ATTEMPT TO KILL YOU!

HECK, THAT'S NOT MURDER, THAT'S NOT MURDER AT ALL!

BESIDES, ANYTHING *I* DO IS JUSTIFIED BY ME WANTING TO DO IT.

HEY, YEAH! THAT'S TRUE! YOU TOLD ME SO YOURSELF.

EXACTLY.

ANYWAY, THE BLAST MAY ONLY CRIPPLE HER.

PUT *THAT* IN YOUR PERSPECTIVE AND SMOKE IT

CONSIDERING THE LAUGHABLE STATE OF MEDICAL SCIENCE IN THIS AGE, SHE'S BETTER OFF DEAD!

THERE'S NO MAGIC SOLUTION TO LIFE-THREATENING INJURIES.

THERE'S MAGIC.

SHUT. *UP.*

NOW YOU GO MARCH RIGHT BACK IN THERE, LOOK THAT DRAGON IN THE EYE, AND SLAY THE HELL OUT OF IT, 'KAY?

THE DRAGON SAID THAT TAKING HER LIFE WOULD BE WRONG.

FIGHTER, I'M GOING TO HADOKEN YOU IN THE BACK BEFORE YOU EVEN DRAW YOUR SWORD

JUST GO IN THERE.

THE DRAGON SAID THAT TAKING HER LIFE WOULD BE WRONG.

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WHEN AM I GOING TO LEARN?

IF YOU WANT SOMETHING SLAUGHTERED, YOU'VE GOT TO SLICE OPEN ITS BELLY YOURSELF.

YOU DON'T WANT TO KILL ME.

NOT SPECIFICALLY, NO.

BUT I ENJOY KILLING IN THE ACADEMIC SENSE.

ALSO IN THE MURDER SENSE.

IF WE TEAMED UP, YOU COULD KILL ALL KINDS OF THINGS.

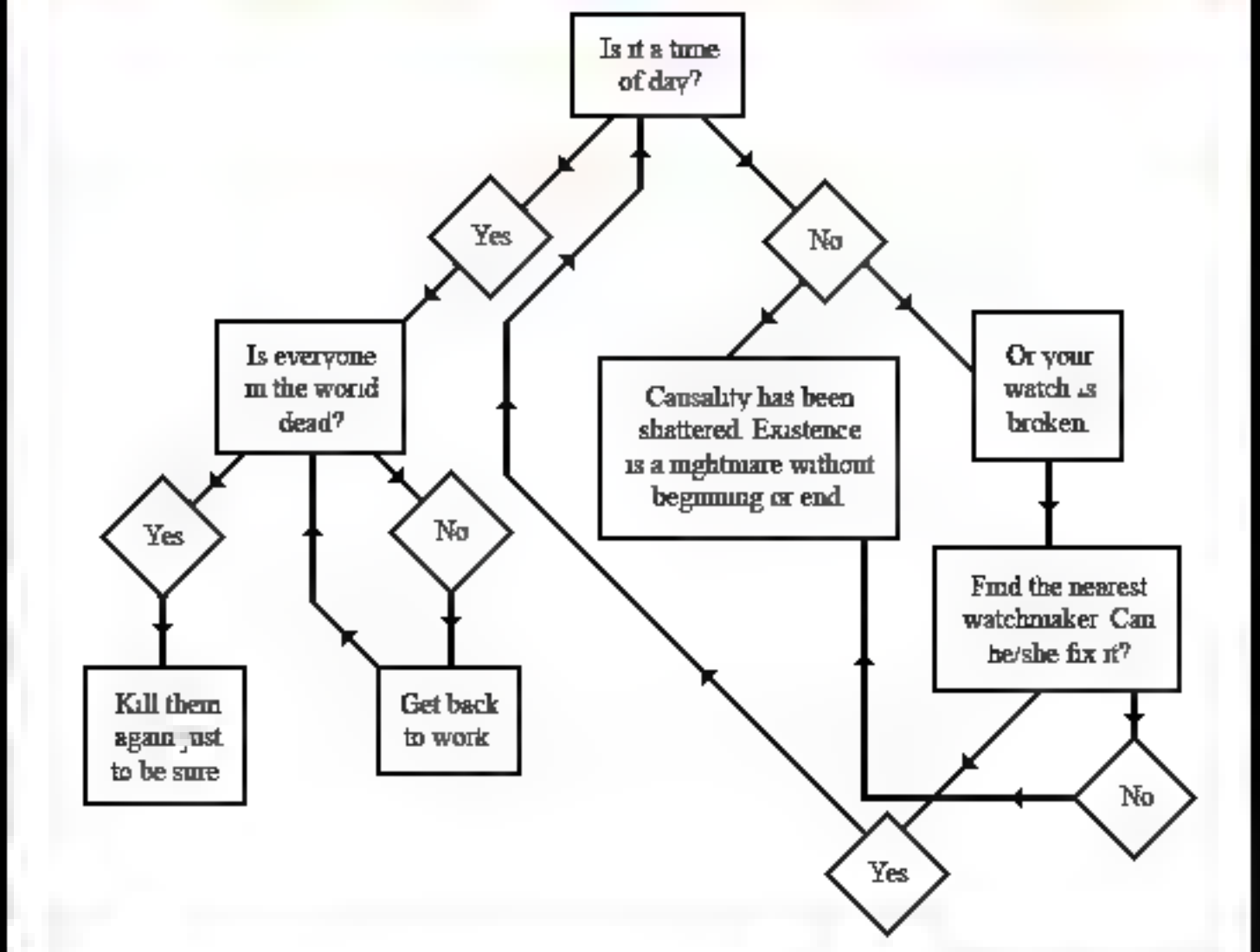
PLEASE. BLACK MAGE DON'T PLAY NO SECOND FIDDLE TO NO BLOATED IGUANA.

BUT I'VE GOT AN INVISIBLE FLYING CASTLE FROM WHICH YOU MAY RAIN DESTRUCTION WITH IMPUNITY

BIG DEAL. AFTER I KILL EVERYONE IN THE WORLD I'LL JUST SAY I HAVE ONE OF THOSE AND WHO'S GONNA KNOW?

YOU HAVEN'T GIVEN THIS A WHOLE LOT OF THOUGHT, HAVE YOU.

HAVE SO. I EVEN WORKED UP A FLOW CHART FOR IT



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YOU KNOW, A GREAT WAY TO WREAK HAVOC IS BY RIDING A DRAGON.

WELL, SURE, EVERYONE KNOWS THAT, BUT WHERE WOULD I...

HEY, I'VE GOT SOME BAD NEWS AND SOME *BAD* NEWS.

SOUNDS LIKE WE'RE SAFE FOREVER.

...AND THAT'S WHY IT WAS THE BEST DAY EVER.

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I CAN'T *BELIEVE* WE SURVIVED.

I HOPE BLACK MAGE MADE IT.

WONDER WHAT HIS BAD NEWS WAS.

UH, FIGHTER.

THINK IT HAD TO DO WITH THE DRAGON EVERY-ONE WAS TALKING ABOUT?

YES, OF COURSE IT DID. HE TRIED TO KILL US WITH THAT DRAGON.

HM, NO.

THAT'S NOT HOW I REMEMBER IT.

I'M THE BLACK MAGE
EVERYTHANG IS GOOD

IT IS TIME FOR COOKIES

THAT'S, THAT'S FOR ME THEN, IS IT?

THANK YOU.

LORD, HE MADE COPIES.

OKAY. *THANK YOU*

JUST TAKE IT WE'LL BE HERE ALL DAY IF YOU DON'T.

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THIS DOESN'T REALLY SHED ANY LIGHT ON HOW WE ESCAPED THOUGH.

OR ANYTHING THAT HAS EVER HAPPENED EITHER.

YOU CAN THANK YOUR BRILLIANT AND, LET'S JUST SAY IT, HANDSOME LEADER FOR THAT

YOU AND FIGHTER ARE WORTH MORE TO ME ALIVE THAN DEAD.

BECAUSE WE'RE SUCH VALU-

NO. IT'S YOUR LIFE INSURANCE.

IT ONLY PAYS DOUBLE IN CASE OF DRAGON, BUT IT PAYS TRIPLE IN CASE OF FAIRY ATTACK.

AND I *JUMPED* OUT!

AH. HE'S STILL HERE?

IT'S MY THING. Y'KNOW, JUMPS.

THAT MUST BE GREAT

BLACK MAGE PROBABLY THINKS WE'RE ALL DEAD.

SO WE HAVE TO STRIKE BACK SOON IF WE WANT TO MAINTAIN THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE.

WE'LL NEED A FOURTH MAN. PREFERABLY ONE WHO KNOWS HOW TO KILL DRAGONS.

I KNOW A GUY WHO KNOWS *ALL ABOUT* KILLING DRAGONS.

ME!

IN CERTAIN RESPECTS, YOU ARE THE WORST DRAGON SLAYER HERE.

LIKE, IN THE RESPECT OF KILLING A DAMN DRAGON.

HEY, EVERY SECOND IT SPENDS *MAULING* HIM IS A SECOND IT'S NOT MAULING US.

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HM, THE CANNON FODDER ANGLE.

I CAN GET BEHIND THAT

IT'S CERTAINLY NO GOOD BEING IN FRONT OF IT.

OKAY. IGNORING YOU

DRAGOON, YOU WILL JUMP UP AND SPEAR THE DRAGON THROUGH ITS HEART KILLING IT INSTANTLY.

THAT'S *TOTALLY* WHAT COULD POSSIBLY HAPPEN!

I MEAN, DRAGONS ARE BASICALLY GIANT SNAKES THAT FLY.

YOU CAN KILL A SNAKE BY STEPPING ON IT, RIGHT?

PERFECTLY LOGICAL.

BUT IT MAKES NO SENSE.

ON THE OTHER HAND, I GUESS I'M WRONG.

HEY, GUYS, WHAT'S UP?

NNNNUTHIN'

COOL. BECAUSE IT SOUNDED LIKE YOU WERE PLANNING TO KILL BLACK [redacted].

NNNNNO?

COOL. BECAUSE FRIENDS LOOK OUT FOR ONE ANOTHER AND *WE'RE* FRIENDS, BUT BLACK MAGE IS *MY BEST* FRIEND.

ALSO, I CAN BLOCK ANY ATTACK AND KILL *ANYTHING* THAT BLEEDS.

HINT

OKAY. LET'S EVERYBODY JUST RELAX. WE'RE ALL FRIENDS HERE.

BIG TIME.

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WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DESTROY NEXT? HOW ABOUT A *KINGDOM*? I REALLY HATE THOSE.

UH ACTUALLY, A SAMMICH WOULD BE NICE.

SHEESH, THE GODS DIDN'T GIVE YOU MUCH OF AN IMAGINATION, DID THEY?

YOU ARE RIDING A DRAGON! I THINK WE CAN AIM A LITTLE HIGHER THAN DESTROYING LUNCH ITEMS.

NO, I'M, Y'KNOW, HUNGRY

AH.

DO PEOPLE EAT TERRIFIED PEOPLE WHO WERE RECENT ROASTED TO DEATH?

NOT AS A RULE, NO.

NOW, HOLD ON. HOW DOES THAT WORK EXACTLY?

I'M A WIZARD, I KNOW MAGIC CAN ONLY BE USED TO HURT PEOPLE.

AND DON'T SAY MAGIC.

THERE'S PROBABLY A KITCHEN IN MY INVISIBLE SKY CASTLE.

SO UNLESS YOU'VE GOT A SPELL THAT DROPS CASTLES ON PEOPLE, THERE'S *NO WAY*...

NOTE TO SELF: MAKE THAT A SPELL.

NO, I'VE GOT THE *AIR ORB*. SO, Y'KNOW, CASTLE IN THE SKY

SO *THAT'S* WHAT THAT THING IS FOR.

NO WONDER SARDA WANTS TO GET ONE.

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WELL, HERE WE ARE.

LOOKS KIND OF NOT THERE.

WHAT DID YOU EXPECT? A VISIBLE INVISIBLE CASTLE?

OKAY, Y'GOT ME THERE.

SO, DO I JUST HOP DOWN...

YEAH. I'M HOVERING OVER THE COURT-YARD RIGHT NOW.

MORON. I NEVER OWNED AN INVISIBLE SKY CASTLE.

JUST THAT *REGULARLY* VISIBLE ONE OVER THERE.

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LET'S USE OUR WORDS BEFORE WE TEAR EACH OTHER APART IN A CATACLYSMIC WAR THAT BRINGS IRONIC RUIN TO THE WORLD WE WERE MEANT TO SAVE!

THAT'S SILLY WHAT COULD POSSIBLY DRIVE US TO THAT?

Talking

Roaring

CAREFUL, YOU'VE GOT A BLACK MAGE ON YOU.

WHA--! WHERE?

DON'T MOVE!

THEY BITE.

GET IT OFF, GET IT OFF!

STOP MOVING!

IT'S IN MY HAIR! IT'S IN MY HAIR!

YOU'RE WEARING A HELMET.

IT'S IN MY HELMET, IT'S IN MY HELMET!

I THINK I CAN SHOO IT AWAY

NO, NO, WAIT. I CAN GET 'IM.

YOU JUST HAVE TO BE SUPER DOUBLE EXTRA CAREFUL IS ALL.

AND PRAY THAT IT'S NOT A ***QUEEN*** BLACK MAGE LOOKING TO LAY ITS HIDEOUS EGGS.

QUEEN BLACK MAGE?

I DUNNO EITHER. IT JUST KINDA ***POPPED*** IN THERE.

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GHOOM!

WHYYYYY...

WAIT I'M NOT IN AGONY

LOOKS LIKE I PINNED YOUR ROBE TO THIS IMPROBABLY *FLOATING* ROCK.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I *REMOVED* YOUR SPEAR...

WELL...

THAT WAS A RHETORICAL QUESTION.

HEH, LOOK AT HIM FALL.

GUESS I'LL HAVE TO...

DOUBLE JUMP!!!

WHYYYYY...

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Project 1083 "Joy-Cannon"
Anti-personnel microwave gun. Earned its nickname due to the overwhelming sense of content one experiences when under its effect

THE GUN BASICALLY COOKS YOUR BRAIN. THE MILD EUPHORIA IS FROM PARTS OF IT DYING!

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

-from-

TEAM ROBO

On Else!

SINCE WE ARE ALL FRIENDS AND NO ONE PLANS TO KILL BLACK MAGE, WE CAN FOCUS ON THE QUEST

HEY, GUYS.

LOOK AT WHAT I FOUND

HE DID IT, HE STRUCK DOWN THE VILE ONE, WE'RE FREE AT LAST!

SUCK IT, EVERYONE IN THE WORLD WHO LIKES BLACK MAGE!

COUGH

IT LIVES. QUICKLY, WHILE HE'S DEFENSELESS, FINISH HIM!

UH HE SAID JOKINGLY? EHEH.

VERY GOOD

THANK GOD

LI'L HELP?

IT'S IN MY LUNG, Y'KNOW

NO?

WE'LL JUST STARE? THAT'S GREAT GUYS

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HEALED AND HEALTHY FOREVER.

IT MAKES ME WANT TO SING...

...A SONG THAT WOULD TURN YOUR HEART INSIDE-OUT, BUT I CAN'T FIGURE OUT THE LYRICS.

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU CONVINCED ME TO HEAL HIM *AGAIN.*

IT WASN'T DIFFICULT

SIX MINUTES PREVIOUS...

HEY, BLACK MAGE GOT HIMSELF *IMPALED* AGAIN.

OH REALLY? LET ME FILE THAT UNDER *NONE OF MY CONCERN*

WOW, THAT'S A BIG FILE.

DRAGOON WAS GONNA MAKE SOME CELEBRATORY PARMIGIANA AFTER BLACK MAGE GOT HEALED, SO.

AND I STILL HAVEN'T SEEN DRAGOON *OR* THIS FABLED PARMIGIANA OF HIS!

GOOD FOOD TAKES TIME.

WHAT'S A *"PARMYJONNI"* AGAIN?

I DON'T KNOW THAT'S WHY I SAID *YOU* WERE GONNA MAKE IT

NOW, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME...

AND WE *ALL* GOT AWAY

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IT'S PRETTY COOL HOW NOTHING HAS SUDDENLY AND DRASTICALLY CHANGED FOR US, HUH.

JUST FOUR BUDS ON A ROADTRIP TO SAVE THE WORLD, THAT'S US.

THE INTERPERSONAL NUANCES THAT DICTATE OUR BEHAVIOR RELATIVE TO ONE ANOTHER HASN'T UNDERGONE A HUGE UPHEAVAL.

BECAUSE WE ALL KNOW THAT I DIDN'T ***REALLY*** TEAM UP WITH THE EVIL DRAGON JUST TO MURDER YOU GUYS.

IT WAS ALL A CUNNING PLOY ON MY PART TO LULL MUFFIN INTO A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY

BUT SHE DOUBLE-CROSSED ME WITH THE ***MORE*** CUNNING PLOY THAT INVISIBLE THINGS ARE NOT, STRICTLY SPEAKING, VISIBLE.

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT AN EVIL DRAGON COULD BE SO UNTRUSTWORTHY?

WHAT'S IMPORTANT IS THAT NO ONE'S PLOTTING AGAINST ANYONE ELSE HERE.

AND WHY WOULD WE?

INDEED

QUITE

D'YOU EVER WONDER IF ***CLOUDS*** SEE SHAPES IN THE ***GROUND***? BECAUSE I WONDER ABOUT THAT A ***LOT***

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NOW WE HAVE TO FIND THE SKY CASTLE AGAIN.

WE COULD START WITH THAT ONE

WHICH ONE?

THE ONE THAT'S A CASTLE IN THE SKY

YOUR STUPIDITY IS MATCHED ONLY BY HOW *INCREDIBLY* DUMB YOU ARE.

DOES THAT LOOK LIKE AN INVISIBLE SKY CASTLE?

SURE, MAYBE. I'VE NEVER SEEN ONE.

CAN YOU IMAGINE WHY?

BECAUSE THEY'RE QUITE RARE?

I...

YOU..

TECHNICALLY, HE'S NOT WRONG, YOU KNOW

BUT HE *SHOULD* BE.

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WE SHOULD START WITH THE VISIBLE SKY CASTLE ANYWAY

WHY'S THAT?

IT'LL BE EASIER TO SEE THE INVISIBLE ONE FROM UP THERE

GOOD THINKING!

BLACK MAGE?

DID YOU SAY SOMETHING?

SHHH.

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OKAY, PROFESSOR, *HOW* DO WE GET UP TO THE CASTLE IN THE SKY?

SIMPLE. WE DON'T. WE BRING IT CRASHING DOWN TO US, DUH.

DOESN'T THAT COMPLETELY NEGATE YOUR ERRONEOUS NOTION THAT WE HAVE TO BE UP HIGH TO SEE THE OTHER *INVISIBLE* SKY CASTLE?

NO.

HOW CONVENIENT THEN

WE'LL JUST FIX IT AFTER IT CRASHES.

"FIX IT"

I MEAN, HOW COMPLICATED COULD IT POSSIBLY BE, ANYWAY?

YOU'RE RIGHT, THE ANCIENT SUPER MAGICS THAT HOLD IT ALOFT ARE OBVIOUSLY MERE FIRST LEVEL SPELLS.

AND LET'S NOT FORGET THE INCREDIBLY SIMPLE TECHNOLOGY THEY PROBABLY USED IN CONCERT

OH, SURE IT'LL BE CHILD'S PLAY TO JUST REVERSE ENGINEER FORGOTTEN THAUMOLOGICAL ARTS FROM THE BURNING RUINS OF THE CASTLE'S WRECKAGE.

YEAH THAT'S MY THEORY

IT'S THE SINCERITY WITH WHICH YOU MAINTAIN THESE IDEAS THAT DE-PRESSES ME THE MOST.

WAIT, WAIT, WAIT A CONCERT? IT FLOATS ON MUSIC?

AFTER *THAT*, IT'S WHAT DEPRESSES ME THE MOST

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RED MAGE. THIS IS ***THE WORST*** PLAN YET IN YOUR LIFETIME FILLED WITH NOTHING ***BUT*** THE WORST PLANS.

IT WILL WORK. I CAN ***GUARANTEE*** IT

IT STARTS AT THE IMPOSSIBLE BEFORE MOVING INTO THE ***EVEN MORE*** IMPOSSIBLER

PRECISELY

IT'S LIKE TALKING TO A BRICK WALL WITH A PARTICULARLY DOOFY HAT ALSO, IT'S UGLY

MY HAT?

THAT TOO.

C'MON RED MAGE SURE, IT'S FUN TO SAY THINGS THAT'LL MAKE BLACK MAGE QUIVER WITH ***IMPOTENT*** RAGE—

WHO TOLD YOU?!

NO ONE DID. AND YOU KNOW THAT BECAUSE NO ONE'S EVER HAD SEX WITH YOU AND THEY NEVER WILL IN A MILLION YEARS.

HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?

JUST BY LOOKING AT YOU.

I MEANT THE MILLION YEARS PART OF IT!

SO DID I

OKAY THEN HOW'D YOU KNOW THE OTHER PART?

JUST BY ***LOOKING*** AT YOU.

CAN WE GET BACK ON TRACK?

I TOLD YOU, THIS WILL WORK

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Y'KNOW, IT'S BEEN TOO LONG SINCE I HAD A HEAD-ACHE

SO, RED MAGE, ENLIGHTEN US.

HOW CAN A PLAN THAT MAKES ***NO SENSE*** WORK?

ONE SIMPLE REASON: IT MAKES TOO LITTLE SENSE TO FAIL.

WHAT

MOST PLANS ARE ***CRITICALLY*** FLAWED BY THEIR OWN LOGIC.

A FAILURE AT ANY STEP WILL RUIN EVERYTHING AFTER IT

THAT'S JUST BASIC CAUSE AND EFFECT

IT'S EASY FOR A GOOD PLAN TO FALL APART

THEREFORE, A PLAN THAT HAS ***NO ATTACHMENT*** TO LOGIC CANNOT BE STOPPED.

THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF ANY GIVEN STEP WILL HAVE NO IMPACT ON THE MACRO LEVEL.

THAT'S SO STUPID I CAN'T EVEN SEE STRAIGHT ANY MORE

NOW IMAGINE WHAT'LL HAPPEN WHEN PHYSICS TRIES TO FIGURE IT OUT!

SERIOUSLY, THIS HURTS

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WE HAVE RUN INTO A SNAG.

COMMON SENSE FINALLY KICK IN?

YES. WE CANNOT SHOOT DOWN THE SKY CASTLE

BECAUSE IT WAS A STUPID IDEA FROM THE START

BECAUSE OUR CANNON BROKE

HOW DO YOU *FIX* THIS?

A SWIFT KICK TO THE HEAD COULD DO IT.

HEY, I'VE GOT TWO KNIVES, ONE FOR *EACH* OF YOU.

OKAY. WE CAN WORK *AROUND* THIS. EASY

WE MAY HAVE TO WAIT FOR GRAVITY TO STOP WORKING ENTIRELY

IT MIGHT TAKE LONGER THAN THE LIFESPAN OF THE UNIVERSE, *BUT* THEN IT MIGHT HAPPEN IN THE NEXT SIX SECONDS TOO.

MAYBE IN THE *NEXT* SIX SECONDS.

AND SO IT FALLS ON THE ELF TO GET ANY-DAMN-THING DONE AROUND HERE. AS USUAL.

I'VE GOT A GOOD FEELING ABOUT THESE NEXT SIX SECONDS.

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OOF

GOSH, WHAT A THROW.

SOMEONE I HATE GET IN MY WAY!

FWAP!

WHAT, LIKE A *TAX* COLLECTOR, MAYBE?

LIKE THAT

SOMEONE WITH A LOT OF HP AND A HIGH DEFENSE GET IN MY WAY!

CRUNCH!

I *MEANT* FIGHTER

BUT DON'T WORRY, EVERYONE, I'M FINE

DON'T EVEN ASK. IT WOULDN'T MAKE SENSE ANY-WAY

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THIS IS EASILY THE *LEAST* INVISIBLE CASTLE IN THE SKY I'VE EVER SEEN.

I TOLD YOU ALREADY, THIS IS THE VISIBLE CASTLE, WE'RE GOING TO STAKE OUT THE INVISIBLE ONE FROM HERE.

HOW DOES BEING UP HERE HELP US TO SEE SOMETHING THAT CAN'T BE SEEN *AT ALL*?

THE CASTLE IS WHAT'S INVISIBLE, NOT THE *PEOPLE* INSIDE OF IT

THAT MAKES NO SENSE.

NO, IT *DOES*. SEE ALSO: WONDER WOMAN'S PLANE.

IF THEY LIVE IN AN INVISIBLE CASTLE, THEN HOW DO THEY KNOW WHERE THE WALLS ARE? OR THE DOORS?

OR THEIR FURNITURE

OR THEIR *TOILETS*.

AND YOU CAN'T *FLY* A PLANE THAT NEVER HAS ANY INSTRUMENTS.

IT'D BE CRASHY

MAYBE IT'S NOT INVISIBLE FROM THE INSIDE. HMMM?

YOU JUST SOLVED THE WALL-DOOR-FURNITURE-TOILET-INSTRUMENT PARADOX!

HE IS A *GENIUS*.

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RED MAGE?

YES?

THANK YOU.

UH. I'M BURNING *ALIVE*

YEAH, FIRE WILL DO THAT

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE, YOU WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT IT FOR LONG.

OH, SO IT'LL STOP ITSELF?

YEAH..

ALL FIRES DO EVENTUALLY HEH.

OKAY, SO WHAT ARE WE DOING?

WELL, RED MAGE HAD A STUPID IDEA AND I'M MAKING IT BETTER WITH MY CUNNING.

EXPLAIN.

THE SHORT VERSION: BY DEFAULT OR MURDER, WE'RE ABOUT TO OWN A FLYING CASTLE

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YOU CAN SAY IT WILL BECOME OUR CASTLE, BUT WHAT DOES THAT REALLY MATTER?

IT'S LIKE SAYING THE ***CLOUDS*** BELONG TO YOU. IT'S MEAN.NGLESS.

THE CLOUDS!

GOD, WHY DIDN'T I TH.NK OF THAT?

WE'LL START WITH A FLAT FEE FOR UNLIMITED USE.

THEN WE'LL INTRODUCE A NEW PLAN TO CHARGE FOR EVERY INDIVIDUAL APPLICATION.

A FEE FOR SHADE, A FEE ***EACH*** FOR RAIN, SNOW, SLEET, HA.L, AND A THUNDER AND LIGHTNING COMBO PACKAGE.

WON'T EVERYONE IN THE WORLD HATE THAT PLAN?

IDEA...Y

THEN WE'LL ANNOUNCE OUR RETURN TO THE FLAT FEE

WHICH WILL BE QUADRUPLE WHAT IT WAS ORIGINALLY, AND THEY'LL ***THANK*** US FOR IT

THAT'S... HOLD ON.

THAT'S REALLY SICK, THIEF

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THE HARD PART WILL BE IN FINDING A WAY TO PLANT FLAGS IN CLOUDS.

WELL, EVEN IF THAT WORKS, WON'T THE FLAGS JUST FA... OUT WHEN IT RAINS?

DAMMIT, FIGHTER.

NO, HE'S GOT A POINT

DON'T SAY THAT. YOU'RE THE ONLY OTHER ONE HERE BESIDES ME WHO *REMOTELY* MAKES SENSE.

DON'T TAKE THAT FROM ME, THIEF

I HAVE SO LITTLE

AND YET I HAVE SO MUCH.

BUT, SERIOUSLY

FIGHTER, THOUGH REACHING THE CONCLUSION VIA THE DUMBEST POSSIBLE ROUTE, IS BASICALLY CORRECT

WE COULD FLY KITES.

HM, YEAH. THAT *WOULD* KEEP THE FLAGS ALOFT. GOOD THINKING

WHO CARES ABOUT FLAGS?

I JUST WANNA FLY A KITE!

I CAN RECALL A TIME WHEN MY LIFE WAS NOT, IN FACT, SPIRALING OUT OF CONTROL BEFORE MY EYES.

WE ARE SO FAR BEYOND THAT NOW, I CAN'T BE CERTAIN THAT IT WASN'T JUST A DREAM.

THOUGH THERE ARE *PERKS*.

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I HAVE TO SAY

THE, UH, DECOR DOESN'T QUITE LIVE UP TO THE HIGH-TECH IMAGE FROM THE LEGENDS.

IT'S GOT ALL THE RUSTIC CHARM OF AN OLD SHED IN THE WOODS UTILIZED EXCLUSIVELY BY DRUNK HOBOS WHO, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, WAKE UP COVERED IN FILTH THAT MAY OR MAY **NOT** BE THEIR OWN.

THAT'S THE POLITE WAY TO PUT IT

THE IMPOLITE WAY BEGINS WITH ME UTTERING A PRAYER TO THE UNMAKER OF ALL THINGS AND **ENDS** WITH FIRE FALLING OUT OF THE SKY UNTIL THIS OVERSIZED HOVEL IS BUT A SMOKING MEMORY

YOU'VE GOT ISSUES, MAN.

FIRST OF ALL, SHUT THE HELL UP AND SECOND OF ALL, AREN'T YOU DEAD?

NOPE I'VE BEEN CASTING LIFE 2 ON MYSELF OR LIFE 3. WHICHEVER

WHAT I KNOW ABOUT WHITE MAGIC COULD FILL A THIMBLE HALFWAY, BUT I KNOW BOTH OF THOSE ARE OUT OF YOUR LEAGUE

I KNOW THAT AND YOU KNOW THAT BUT I DON'T KNOW THAT

IT'D BE GREAT IF I COULD UNHEAR THAT

SEE? NO HARM DONE

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DON'T *MISCONSTRUE* THIS AS CONCERN FOR YOUR WELL BEING..

..I MEAN, A CATTLE FARMER IS, BY *NECESSITY*, INTERESTED IN THE HEALTH OF HIS LIVESTOCK..

..BUT DOESN'T IT WORRY YOU TO BE, YOU KNOW, *AFLAME*?

ARE YOU KIDDING? THIS IS GREAT

THIS IS LIKE IF BURNING HANDS WAS A *SEVENTH* LEVEL SPELL!

MAYBE SIXTH

AND ANYWAY, IT'S AUTO-HIT TO BOOT!

I COULD HUG YOU FOR 3D4 PER TURN, THIEF

PER TURN.

NO, I'D BE AN *IDIOT* TO GIVE *THIS* UP, THANKS.

OF COURSE WHAT WAS I THINKING?

THAT DOESN'T HURT AT ALL?

HM?

THE SPELL THAT BRINGS YOU BACK.

OH, IT'S QUITE EXCRUTIATING.

AT LEAST IT'S NOT AS BAD AS THE BURNING.

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WELL. WE OWN THE SKIES.

IT'S NOT A CLAIM I'M AGAINST MAKING, BUT FOR MY OWN KNOWLEDGE, DO WE HAVE ANY WAY OF BACKING THAT UP?

I MEAN, CAN WE PILOT THIS SKY CASTLE? IS THAT EVEN THE RIGHT WORD TO USE?

PILOT?

THE WAY I SEE IT WHO CARES?

THAT'S SOMETHING WE CAN WORRY ABOUT AFTER THE LOWER NATIONS START TO PAY US TRIBUTE FOR THE USE OF OUR CLOUDS, SUN, STARS, WEATHER, AND AIR.

SURE. WHAT COULD *POSSIBLY* GO WRONG?

OH THE DRAGON.

WHO IS IN THE WRONG CASTLE BY THE WAY!

HOW'S THAT?

YOUR CASTLE IS INVISIBLE

I WAS LYING.

LYING?

I'M AN EVIL DRAGON. I LIE.

AND HERE I THOUGHT WE WERE GOING TO BE ARMAGEDDON BUDDIES.

RIGHT UP UNTIL I BACK STABBED YOU, ANYWAY.

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AND I SEE THIEF HAS *DISAPPEARED* ON ME

WHAT A *SURPRISE* THAT A COWARD WOULD RUN AWAY AT THE FIRST SIGN OF A DRAGON.

IT'S NOT EASY TO FIND TRUSTWORTHY COMRADES.

STAND BACK, BLACK MAGE!

IT'S NOT EASY TO FIND *SMART ONES* EITHER.

WHAT IS THIS? A FORM OF PROTEST? PERFORMANCE ART?

IT'S AN ATTACK

AN ATTACK?

AN ATTACK! ONCE I'M DEVOURED

DON'T TELL ME PLEASE.

YOU'RE GOING TO USE FIRE ON MUFFIN'S INTERNAL ORGANS. CORRECT?

CORRECT

THE FIRE-*BREATHING* DRAGON.

PRECISELY

THIS... THAT DOESN'T SHE *BREATHES* FIRE!

IF WE WERE TO PLOT THE DISTANCE BETWEEN WHERE YOU ARE *RIGHT NOW* AND THE NEAREST GOOD IDEA, IT WOULD DESCRIBE A LINE TOO BIG TO FIT INSIDE THE UNIVERSE

FIRE-BREATHING, BLACK MAGE. *NOT* FIRE-EATING.

HE'S ALL YOURS!

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HAVE AT YOU!

HMM. NO.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, NO?

I'M GOING TO WAIT FOR YOU TO BURN TO DEATH.

HA! JOKE'S ON YOU, I CAST LIFE 2 ON MYSELF, LIKE, FIFTY TIMES EARLIER.

I CAN KEEP BURNING TO DEATH ALL DA--

IT WAS LIFE 3.

AND, AS YOU *APPARENTLY* LOST COUNT, THAT WAS DEATH FIFTY-ONE NEXT.

UH...

DON'T LOOK AT ME, I'M ON YOUR SIDE

KINDA?

NICE TRY, MAGE BOY

I CAN FIND YOU MORE MEAT?

DO I *LOOK* LIKE I NEED HELP TO KI...?

YOU'RE BASICALLY JUST INSECTS TO ME, Y'KNOW

THE THOUGHT HAD OCCURRED TO ME

ALSO?

NYAH!

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RUNNING AWAY IS SO GREAT

I CAN SEE WHAT THIEF GETS OUT OF IT BESIDES SURVIVAL, THAT IS.

I CAN START A NEW LIFE.

GET A NEW WARDROBE

ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A RESTAURATEUR GET FREE MEALS AND TO YELL AT UNDERLINGS. WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?

AND MYSTERY MEAT STEW IS THE PERFECT WAY TO DISPOSE OF ALL THOSE PESKY BODIES.

MAYBE TENNIS INSTRUCTOR?

WELCOME BACK.

AH.

GUESS I SHOULD'VE STOPPED RUNNING AT SOME POINT

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OKAY, THAT? THAT WAS JUST *PRACTICE* OKAY?

SURE, IF YOU LIKE

REALLY? YOU DON'T MIND?

I CAN REMEMBER WHEN YOUR LANGUAGE WAS NOTHING BUT QUAINT LITTLE GRUNTS AND SNEEZES.

THAT YOU WILL BE SLAUGHTERED AT MY LEISURE IS A FORE-GONE CONCLUSION. SO, GO AHEAD AND RUN YOUR CHUBBY LITTLE HEART OUT

WELL, IT'S CLEAR YOU NEVER BARGAINED ON THE AWESOME POWER OF THE MIGHTY LIGHT WARRIORS.

THEY'LL BE ALONG SOON.

HERE'S A TIP.

TAKE OUT FIGHTER FIRST

NOT SURE IF IT'S PRACTICAL. I JUST HATE THE GUY

IS THERE A WAY TO MAKE IT QUICK BUT ALSO SLOW AND UNNECESSARILY PAINFUL?

'CAUSE I COULD WATCH THAT

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I'D LIKE TO MAKE AN OFFER.

THAT'S PRECIOUS.

WHAT COULD YOU POSSIBLY HAVE TO OFFER ME?

YOUR SURVIVAL.

HA!

I LIKE YOU, ELF.

LOOK, IT'S A SIMPLE MATTER OF HISTORY AND PATTERN RECOGNITION.

THERE ARE FOUR ORBS. WE'VE COME ACROSS THREE OF THEM. EACH WAS GUARDED BY AN INCREDIBLY POWERFUL BEING THAT FAR OUTCLASSED US.

WE KILLED THEM. WE KILLED THEM ALL.

THE KING OF DEATH, THE QUEEN OF FIRE, AND A MONSTER WHO EATS UNIVERSES OR SOMETHING.

I WAS NEVER TOO CLEAR ON THAT.

ANYWAY, YOU'VE GOT THAT FOURTH ORB.

NOW I'M NOT SAYING WE'RE GOING TO KILL YOU. HELL, I DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW WE'D DO IT.

I AM SAYING THAT MONSTERS WITH ORBS HAVE A WAY OF DYING WHEN WE'RE AROUND THEM. MAYBE IT'S FATE?

BUT MAYBE IT DOESN'T HAVE TO COME TO THAT. MAYBE WE CAN TALK THINGS OUT. WHO KNOWS?

YOU'LL BE THE FIRST TO DIE, YOU KNOW.

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RED MAGE! I BRING YOU MOST DIRE NEWS.

NOPE

ER, I'M SORRY?

WE BOTH KNOW YOU'RE NOT REAL.

I'M PRETTY SURE I AM.

WELL, OF COURSE YOU'D SAY THAT

KNOWING, AS YOU DO, THAT YOU ARE ***NOT*** REAL, YOUR ONLY RECOURSE IS TO CONVINCE ME YOU ARE.

IS THERE A WAY TO CONVINCE YOU THAT I'M NOT TRYING TO CONVINCE YOU THAT I'M, IN FACT, REAL?

CONCEIVABLY, SUCH AN ARGUMENT EXISTS. ***BUT*** I AM FAR TOO INTELLIGENT TO TO BE COERCED IN THIS MATTER

BUT IF I DON'T EXIST, THEN I'M A PRODUCT OF YOUR MIND THEREFOR I'M INTELLIGENT ENOUGH TO CONVINCE YOU THAT I ***AM*** REAL.

HUH...

YOU'VE CONVINCED ME.

EXCEL..ENT!

SO YOU CAN'T BE REAL. NICE TRY

BUT--!

WAKING UP NOW!

I'M ALIVE...

OH, NO YOU DON'T WE HAD A DEAL. YOU DIE AND I GET TO SELL YOUR BODY TO SCIENCE.

OR A DRAGON.

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YOU ARE BRASH, ELF, I WILL GIVE YOU THAT

BUT NOTHING MORE

YOUR POSITION IS WEAK

IF YOU TRULY BELIEVED I COULD BE SO EASILY SLAIN, YOU'D SIMPLY DO SO RATHER THAN BARGAIN.

I ONLY WISH TO AVOID THE UNNECESSARY BLOODSHED SUCH A BATTLE WOULD INCUR

YOU'RE AN *ELF* YOUR HISTORY IS A VERY LONG LOVE POEM DEDICATED TO BLOODSHED

AND TO YOURSELVES.

OR MAYBE I WANT AN ELDER DRAGON INDEBTED TO ME FOR THE REST OF OUR INCREDIBLY LONG LIVES.

OH THIS IS BEYOND RICH.

YOU EXPECT TO GET THE ORB OF AIR FROM ME AND FAVORS?

AND WHY NOT? I'M ALREADY DOING YOU A FAVOR BY HAVING THIS CONVERSATION.

CALL MY BLUFF, IF YOU LIKE.

WE'RE LIGHT WARRIORS, AND LIGHT WARRIORS GET *ORBS* OF LIGHT

THAT'S JUST THE WAY IT IS.

YOU CAN BE ALIVE OR *DEAD* WHEN IT'S DONE.

I GET WHAT I WANT EITHER WAY, *SO*...

THE QUESTION IS, HOW DO YOU GET WHAT *YOU* WANT?

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ONE HOUR LATER...

SO, THEN WE, THE PARTIES OF THE FIRST AND SECOND PARTS ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT TO EXCHANGE GOODS FOR SERVICES.

TO WIT

ONE AIR ORB TO BE DELIVERED UNTO THE WARRIORS OF LIGHT IN EXCHANGE FOR NOT KILLING ANYONE TO GET IT.

FURTHER, THE WARRIORS OF LIGHT HEREBY AGREE TO **NOT** DESTROY THE SKY CASTLE IN EXCHANGE FOR BEING ALLOWED TO LEAVE ALIVE

THAT IS... ACCEPTABLE

ALL RIGHT THEN, I'LL JUST WORK UP THE DOCUMENTS AND WE'LL MAKE THIS OFFICIAL.

BAH! DOCUMENTS ARE LEAVES IN THE WIND TO DRAGONKIND OUR WORD IS OUR BOND

WE'LL SHAKE ON IT

IT'S UNORTHODOX, BUT NOT WITHOUT PRECEDENT. OKAY, SURE, A HANDSHAKE

AND THAT'S WHEN I CHANGED MY MIND.

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I HAD NO IDEA MY NECK COULD BEND THAT WAY

OR THAT MANY TIMES.

OR THAT QUICKLY

I WAS QUITE SURPRISED AS WELL.

PEOPLE USUALLY BREAK BY NOW

OKAY SO MY HEAD IS STILL ATTACHED THEN?

AGAINST ALL ODDS.

BUT IT WAS FACING THE WRONG WAY FOR A BIT

THAT WOULD EXPLAIN THE INCREDIBLE PAIN.

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE, I'M GOING TO KILL YOU AND THEN IT WON'T MATTER.

IT WAS A GUTSY MOVE, ELF BUT I'VE BEEN AT THIS PLAN TO USURP ALL THE POWER, WEALTH, AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE DRAGONS SINCE THE SKY WAS PUT INTO PLACE

YOU WERE NEVER GOING TO DEFEAT ME.

NONE OF YOU PETTY LITTLE THINGS *COULD*

I AM SO FAR BEYOND YOU, IT'S ACTUALLY A TESTAMENT TO MY GENIUS THAT I'M ABLE TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOU AT ALL.

CHOOM!

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A SPEAR? THROUGH MY BRAIN?

MY...ONLY... WEAKNESS...!

WHU-THUD

AND THAT'S WHY THEY CALL ME DRAGOON.

ALSO, IT'S MY NAME

SO, THAT'S ANOTHER GOOD REASON PEOPLE USUALLY CALL ME DRAGOON.

I DON'T ANSWER TO SEBASTIAN.

YOU KILLED MUFFIN?

SERIOUSLY, I'M ASKING. MY RETINAS MAY HAVE DETACHED FROM SHAKING.

OH, SHE'S QUITE DEAD

Y'KNOW, I'M NOT SURE IF "MUFFIN" WAS REALLY HER NAME!

THAT'S FASCINATING. NOW SHUT UP AND GET OFF MY FLYING UNFAIR TAXATION FORTRESS.

DO ELVES HAVE A WORD FOR GRATITUDE?

GOD, I'D THROW YOU OFF MYSELF IF I COULD ONLY SEE

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THIS IS COOL. WE'RE DOING A DUNGEON CRAWL LIKE REAL HEROES DO 'EM!

HARDLY

WE'RE CLIMBING AROUND THE GRIMEY INTERIOR OF AN STINKY OLD CASTLE.

THAT'S WHAT DUNGEON CRAWLING IS ALL ABOUT!

AND A BIG DRAGON OWNED THE JOINT!

WHO *KNOWS* WHAT MYSTERIES ARE HIDDEN DOWN HERE?

OKAY, IT *IS* AN ANCIENT FLYING TECHNO-MAGIC CASTLE, AND THAT'S KIND OF NEAT, BUT WE'RE ONLY DOWN HERE SO THIEF CAN CHEAT US OUT OF OUR SHARE OF DRAGON HIDES.

I BET THERE'S BOOTY TRAPS!

YOU MEAN BOOBY TRAPS?

HEH, HEH, HEH.

OH, REAL MATURE, MAN.

OKAY, THIS MUST BE IT

WAIT, HOW DO WE KNOW THE WHOLE CASTLE WON'T CRASH WHEN WE TAKE IT?

IT'S NOT LIKE IT'S HOOKED UP TO ANYTHING. IT'S SITTING THERE ON THE FLOOR.

COULD BE BOOTY TRAPPED THOUGH.

SEE? WERE FINE. EVERYTHING IS FINE.

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SEVERAL MINUTES EARLIER

WITH THOSE TWO OUT OF THE WAY, WE CAN PROPERLY DIVVY UP THE LOOT OF OUR KILL.

UM, POINT OF ORDER?

IT WAS MY KILL

NO ONE LIKES A GLORY HOG

SERIOUSLY, IT WAS A TEAM EFFORT

ENACTED WHOLLY BY ME ALONE.

LET'S NOT DISCOUNT HOW WELL I SINGLE-HANDEDLY TRICKED MUFFIN INTO THINKING WE WERE JUST BUNGLING MORONS...

YES. TRICKED

THUS LULLING THE DRAGON INTO A FALSE SENSE OF SUPERIORITY FOR TH.EF TO DELIVER THE KILLING BLOW!

I DON'T MEAN TO BE A STICKLER ABOUT THIS, BUT IT WAS MY BLOW THAT KI..ED IT

IT'S NOT IMPORTANT. NO ONE CARES ABOUT WHAT DRAGOON DIDN'T REALLY DO.

BUT I DID—

WHAT *IS* IMPORTANT IS THAT WE CAN SELL THIS QUKRX GRADE MEAT AT CRAZY HIGH PRICES TO THE REFUGEES OF ONRAC AND WHATEVER WARS KING STEVE IS DOING THIS WEEK.

WHAT GRADE?

YOU CAN'T KEEP RIDING OUR COATTAILS IF YOU CAN'T KEEP UP WITH US, DRAGOON

QUKRX. IT'S AN IRRATIONAL LETTER THAT EXISTS OUTSIDE OF THE ALPHABET.

THAT'S STUPID

YEAH, OKAY, *SURE* I'D LIKE TO SEE YOU PLAY HYPO-THETICAL SCRABBLE WITHOUT IT

DOES ANYONE ELSE HEAR THAT? SOUNDS LIKE A BOOTY TRAP...

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GRAND ROYAL ASTROLOGER, THERE WAS AN EXPLOSION IN THE SKY THAT YOUR CHARTS UTTERLY FAILED TO PREDICT

EXPLAIN YOURSELF OR FACE SUMMARY EXECUTION

AND THEN PARAPHRASED EXECUTION.

HA-CHA-CHA-CHA!

I HAVE A *THEORY*

THE HEAVENS ARE NOT, AS WE HAVE PREVIOUSLY SUPPOSED, UNCHANGING

THEY ARE IN A CONSTANT STATE OF FLUX A TURMOIL!

BUT IT TAKES PLACE ON A SCALE FAR BEYOND OUR DAY-TO-DAY LIVES.

ALL OF OUR HISTORY IS BUT A BLINK OF THE EYE TO THE STARS ABOVE.

INTERVALS BETWEEN SIGNIFICANT, OBSERVABLE CELESTIAL EVENTS ARE BEST MEASURED IN EPOCHS.

SO, TO OUR LIMITED PERSPECTIVES, THE HEAVENS APPEAR CONSTANT AND ETERNAL

THE FIERY EVENT IN THE SKY, THOUGH RARE, WAS INEVITABLE.

IT IS NOT A PORTENT OF DOOM, BUT EVIDENCE OF A FAR LARGER, MORE AMAZING UNIVERSE THAN WE EVER CONSIDERED.

HM. AND WHAT SAY YOU, GRAND ROYAL AUGUR?

NO, HE'S CRAZY.

YOU ARE SURE?

BIG TIME. I CHECKED THE PATTERN OF FLOATING TEA LEAVES AND CONFIRMED MY SUSPICIONS BY CONSULTING THE SOUND OF BIRDS' WINGS.

YOU HEARD THE MAN.

BUT, BUT I, BUT--!

IF IT WAS THE LEAVES *OR* THE WINGS, I COULD HELP YOU OUT

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I DID IT I CAN'T ***BELIEVE*** IT, BUT I ACTUALLY DID IT!

I OUT-LIVED ALL THOSE JERKS!

I'VE WANTED THIS FOR ***SO LONG***, I DON'T KNOW HOW TO PROPERLY ENJOY IT HAPPENING!

I'LL HAVE TO INVENT A WHOLE ***NEW ATROCITY*** TO PROPERLY CELEBRATE THE EVENT

MAYBE THERE'S A WAY TO RAPE ***AND*** PILLAGE USING ONLY ONE HAND..

YOU KNOW, I CAN HEAR EVERY WORD OF THIS, DON'T YOU?

YES, AND I DON'T CARE!

BECAUSE YOU WILL BE MY QUEEN OF THE DEAD!

THERE'S SO MUCH WRONG WITH THAT, AND I'M NOT EVEN COUNTING THE PART WHERE YOU DON'T ***KNOW*** HOW INCREDIBLY WRONG YOU ARE.

OH, YOU'LL COME AROUND.

THEY ***ALWAYS*** DO.

JUST SHUT UP I'VE GOT A LOT OF WORK TO DO.

NOW

CHOOM!

SKGLAGLE

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THERE

HOW DO YOU BOYS GET YOURSELVES INTO SO MUCH TROUBLE, ANYWAY?

BY OBEYING THE LAW!

AND NEVER CHEATING!

REALLY? I THOUGHT IT WAS ALL BLACK MAGE.

ZJGLORKL.

YEAH. SORRY ABOUT THAT

HE'S FINE

JRALGK!

WE COULD TRY PULLING IT OUT?

THAT WOULD CAUSE MORE DAMAGE THAN LEAVING IT IN.

HENCE, WHITE MAGE!

NOT SO MUCH I USED ALL MY JUICE SAVING YOUR LIVES.

WE COULD *PUSH* IT

Y'KNOW THE REST OF THE WAY

I GUESS THAT WOULD ONLY BE UNNECESSARILY PAINFUL..

OKAY!

DGTHULG!

LET THE RECORD SHOW THE PATIENT MADE NO *INTELLIGIBLE* OBJECTION TO TREATMENT

THAT'S SETTLED THEN NOW, SERIOUSLY, WHERE'S THE ORB?

IT MUST'VE BEEN LOST IN THE EXPLOSION.

WE WILL HAVE TO SET UPON A WHOLE NEW QUEST TO FIND IT!

NO, WAIT THERE IT IS.

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I KIND OF LIKE HIM THIS WAY

HE TALKS A LOT LESS.

MRGDLJ!

WELL, YOU CAN'T TELL WHAT HE'S SAYING, ANYWAY THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH.

I'VE ONLY A RUDIMENTARY KNOWLEDGE OF THE MEDICINAL ARTS --

-- WHICH, WHILE QUALIFYING ME TO PERFORM ADVANCED BRAIN SURGERY, BLINDFOLDED GENETIC ENGINEERING, AND DRUNKEN HEART TRANS-PLANTS --

-- LEAVES ME A *LITTLE* UNCLEAR ON THE ISSUE OF BLEEDING TO DEATH.

I.E. WON'T HE?

AFTER A THOROUGH GLANCE, MY PROFESSIONAL OPINION IS THAT IT MIGHT NOT HAPPEN.

LET'S LOOK AT THE FACTS, SHALL WE?

THERE'S A SPEAR GOING THROUGH THE BASE OF HIS SKULL AND STICKING OUT HIS THROAT

HE'D HAVE PROBABLY DIED *BY NOW* IF IT WAS FATAL.

MEANWHILE

HEY THERE WELCOME TO THE PARTY

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OKAY, I THINK THAT'S DONE IT

I DON'T WANT TO BE OVERLY CRITICAL HERE, BUT HE LOOKS ***EXACTLY*** THE SAME

YES. THE SAME, BUT DIFFERENT! HE'S MOSTLY STABLE NOW.

MOSTLY?

REALLY, BLACK MAGE, I'M SORRY.

I MEAN, YOU DIDN'T SEEM TO MIND ALL THOSE ***OTHER*** TIMES I NEARLY KILLED YOU WITH MY SPEAR

I CAN'T JUMP AROUND AND BE SUPER COOL AS LONG AS MY SPEAR IS LODGED IN YOUR THROAT IF, UH, THAT MAKES YOU FEEL ANY BETTER

YEAH I ***GUESS***

WAIT, WHY CAN'T YOU?

WELL, IT KIND OF WORKS.

HEY, THIS MEANS BLACK MAGE CAN STILL TECHNICALLY PARTICIPATE IN OUR BATTLES!

YAY! I MADE ***EVERYTHING*** BETTER FOR EVERY-ONE!

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NOW THAT THE ORB OF AIR IS LIBERATED, WE CAN ALL AGREE TO HAND IT WILLINGLY TO ME

YEEEAAAH.

WE'RE GONNA DO A THING LIKE THAT

REALLY? I THOUGHT YOU'D WANT TO STEAL IT.

SHUT UP

AHAHA! YOU'RE SUCH A JOKESTER, FIGHTER!

YOU'LL SCREW UP THE WHOLE THING FOR ME!

OH! I GET IT NOW.

YOU CAN COUNT ON ME TO HELP YOU TRICK DRAGOON INTO LETTING US TAKE THE ORB OF AIR AWAY FROM HIM

YOU'RE TRYING TO TRICK HIM. I'M WITH YA! WINK!

OH, RED MAAAGE!

DEAR GODS IN HEAVEN--RED MAGE!

YOU SEE, HE'S A CON ARTIST SO YOU'VE GOT TO BE ON YOUR TOES WITH HIM.

AND I DON'T MEAN TRYING TO CHEAT ON A HEIGHT EXAM. NO S.R. I MEAN, LIKE, YOU GOTTA BE SMART.

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THE ORB OF AIR IS MY HERITAGE.

AND I NEED IT TO REBUILD THE DRAGOON ARMY

WHAT, SO YOU GUYS CAN KILL ALL THE DRAGONS THAT AREN'T LEFT ANY-MORE?

I DIDN'T SAY IT WAS A PERFECT PLAN, DID I?

EVEN IF I WANTED TO GIVE IT TO YOU, SARDA'S GOING TO ***JACKASS*** US AWAY AT ANY SECOND

WHAT IS A SARDA?

SERIOUSLY ***JACKASS*** COVERS THAT ONE.

THE MOST FRUSTRATING PART IS THAT HE COULD'VE TELEPORTED THE ORB TO HIMSELF AT ANY POINT

AND HE KNOWS THAT ***WE*** KNOW THAT, BUT HE SENDS US OUT HERE TO BRAVE CERTAIN DEATH.

WELL, TO BE FAIR, SOMETIMES WE ***ONLY*** BRAVE SEVERE MUTILATION.

SOME OF US MORE THAN OTHERS.

WELL, OF COURSE.

COULD I REASON WITH HIM?

WHAT?

I'M JUST... I'M THINKING ABOUT THE QUESTION.

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IF HE ALREADY HAS THE OTHER ORBS, SURELY HE WOULDN'T MISS THIS ONE

HE SEEMS PRETTY SERIOUS ABOUT GETTING THE ORBS.

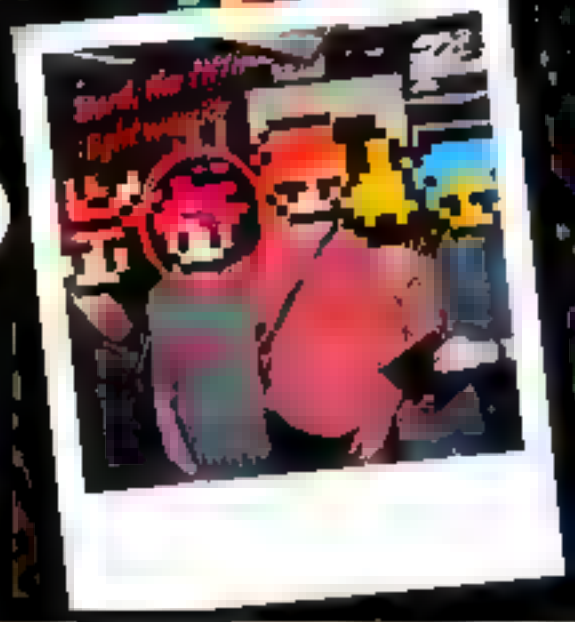
FOR SOME REASON.

YOU DON'T KNOW WHY?

THE THING ABOUT SARDA IS THAT THE MORE HE TALKS, THE MORE CHANCES IT GIVES HIM TO UNMAKE YOU BEFORE YOU WERE BORN, SO NO ONE WOULD KNOW YOU WERE ALIVE

HAS HE DONE THAT BEFORE?

PROBABLY NOT



IS HE DROOLING BLOOD ON MY CLEAN CAVE FLOORS?

I NEEDED THAT SPEAR

NO, HE'S **BLEEDING** BLOOD

FROM TWO **DIFFERENT**, BUT RELATED, GAPING HEAD WOUNDS.

OH, THAT'S FINE THEN.

I REALLY DID.

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COME ON. I JUST CLEANED IN HERE, AND NOW HE'S GOOING IT UP WITH ALL THAT BLOOD

REALLY? YOU CLEANED UP FOR US?

A FEW TEN THOUSAND YEARS BEFORE YOU WERE BORN, YES, I DID

BUT HOW--

UGH, YOUR CONCEPT OF SPACE-TIME IS BOTH TIRESOME AND EMBARRASSING. ***SERIOUSLY***

WE CAN'T HELP BEING ***LINEAR***

THAT'S FUNNY IT SOUNDED LIKE YOU ***DIDN'T*** SAY "HERE'S THE ORB OF AIR"

BUT ***THAT*** CAN'T BE TRUE, BECAUSE I'M VERY IMPATIENT AND CAN TURN YOUR BRAINS INSIDE-OUT

SO, WE FOUND THIS ORB!

MUHUHAHA!

DID HE GO "MWA HA HA HA"?

IT WAS MORE OF A "MU HU."

WHATEVER I'M SAYING, IS THAT WHAT WE HEARD?

THAT WAS NOT A GOOD GUY LAUGH.

MAYBE IT WASN'T A LAUGH. MAYBE IT WAS HIS ALLERGIES.

ALLERGIES.

SURE.

THE OMNIPOTENT SUPER WIZARD HAS ***ALLERGIES***? YOU'RE STICKING WITH THAT ONE THEN, ARE YOU?

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HUHU HAHAH*AHEM*. YOU'RE STILL HERE.

SEE? ALLERGIES.

SARDA, IT'S TIME TO COME CLEAN WITH US. WHY DO YOU WANT THE ORBS?

THEY... I NEED THEM.

FOR MY ALLERGIES.

WHAT!

SORRY, I WAS AIMING FOR HIM.

YEAH. *THAT* WAS GOING TO HAPPEN.

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SO... ARE WE GOING TO HAVE A BIG CLIMATIC BATTLE NOW?

YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT? YOU GUYS THREATEN ME LIKE A GENTLE BREEZE.

IN THAT CASE, COULD YOU FIX BLACK MAGE THEN?

YEAH, SURE.

HMM, SOMETHING IS NOT THE SAME NOW.

"FIXED"?

FOR A GIVEN DEFINITION OF "FIXED"

AH. AND WHICH ONE IS THIS?

THE ONE WHERE HE STOPS BLEEDING ON MY FLOOR

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THAT ISN'T ANY OF MY BUSINESS, IS IT?

HE COULD BE ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD

OR, MORE ACCURATELY, THE *UNIVERSE!*

HEY

OR RIGHT OUTSIDE

THE UNIVERSE, HUH?

RIGHT OUTSIDE IS A PART OF THE UNIVERSE!

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UGH, THOSE HORRIBLE LIGHT WARRIORS!

THEY MAKE ME SO MAD.

THEY TOOK MY SPEAR.

ALL THEY HAVE TO DO IS SAVE THE WORLD FROM A TOTAL, YET VAGUE, DOOM MENTIONED IN AN ANCIENT PROPHECY. IS THAT SO HARD?

IS IT?

THEY TOOK MY SPEAR

WELL, IT MUST BE! BECAUSE EVERYWHERE I GO IT'S BLIGHT WARRIORS THIS AND INSATIABLE FLYING DEATH MONGERS THAT

THOUGH, THE FLYING BIT THAT MIGHT BE EXAGGERATION *ANYWAY!*

THEY'RE JERKS AND THEY'RE NO GOOD

IT WAS A REALLY GOOD SPEAR.

IT WAS A PLEASANT COLOR.

THEY DID A NUMBER OF ATROCITIES AT OR NEAR ME. THE MOST RECENT OF WHICH BEING THE DUAL DESTRUCTION OF ONRAC THE WEEK MY MOST RECENT FAMILY AND I MOVED INTO IT.

YOU POOR, POOR DEAR.

WELL, OKAY, BUT LET'S NOT OVERLOOK THE TRAGIC SUFFERING OF THOSE AMONG US WHO ARE NOW MISSING A SPEAR.

SO, WHERE'S THE SPEAR?

NOT UP MY FACE WHAT'S IMPORTANT IS THAT HE MUST HAVE CAST A HEALING SPELL ON ME!

KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS?

NOTHING. I TURNED THE SPEAR INTO A ***HEALING SPEAR***. LIKE THIS HEALING SHIV

OR MAYBE THAT'S MY REGULAR SHIV

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AHHHH, THANKS.

WHAT THE.. HOW DID

YOU SON OF A.

YOU NEVER HEAL ME!

I'M SURE THE WANTON DESTRUCTION OF MY HAT COLLECTION HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH IT EITHER.

IT WAS A MINOR INJURY

YOU USUALLY GET MINCED

I'M THE CASTER, Y'KNOW!

IT'S LIKE I'M A CANNON MADE OUT OF GLASS.

LIKE A... Y'KNOW, LIKE A DAINTY FIGURINE SO ORNATELY DECORATED YOU CAN'T IMAGINE HOW SOMETHING SO FRAGILE MANAGES TO EXIST IN THIS BRUTAL, UGLY [illegible]...

AND IT MAKES YOU WEEP.

I'VE GOT SOMETHING IN MY EYE.

I...WOULD'VE JUST STUCK WITH GLASS CANNON. PROBABLY

THAT WAS WEIRDER THAN IT HAD TO BE

AND YET, PAR FOR THE COURSE

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THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT WE GET OUR QUEST REWARD.

AND, SINCE THIS IS THE FINAL QUEST IN A LINE OF RELATED QUESTS, IT'LL BE AN *AMAZING* REWARD.

LIKE, Y'KNOW, A SWORD OR A BELT OR WHATEVER, BUT REALLY COOL.

HE MUST KEEP IT IN THE BACK.

WE HAVE FAILED TO ENACT ANY SIGNIFICANT REVENGE AGAINST THE HATED LIGHT WARRIORS.

POINT OF ORDER NUH-UH!

YAR YE SLAMS O' POETRY BE AS SIGNIFICANT AS A PEE IN THE OCEAN.

IT'S WHAT WE'RE ALL THINKING.

FINE

CONSIDER *FUTURE* POETRY JAMS CANCELLED THEN

NOW I HAVE TO FIX THE NEWSLETTER. THANKS A LOT, GUYS.

NOBODY BE *READIN'* YE THRICE DAMNED NEWSLETTER!

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LET'S FACE THE FACTS. OUR PLANS, THOUGH NUANCED AND BENIUS, ARE CHILD'S PLAY FOR THE COMBINED CUNNING OF THE LIGHT WARRIORS.

I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE OUR QUEST REWARDS!

HE'S BEEN GONE FOR HOURS. WE'RE NOT GETTING ANYTHING.

OR WE'RE GETTING SO MUCH THAT IT'S TAKING HIM HOURS TO COLLECT IT ALL.

YOU DIDN'T THINK OF THAT, DID YOU!

NO, I CAN HONESTLY SAY THAT NEVER OCCURED TO ME.

WELL, THAT'S WHY I'M THE FRACTACTICAL GENIUS AND YOU'RE JUST SOME GUY WHO WEARS GOONY PANTS.

AND WE CAN SEE WHO GOT THE BETTER OF THOSE TWO OPTIONS.

WE SURRRRRE CAN.

THAT YOU *THINK* IT'S YOU IS SO GODDAMN ANNOYING

INCORRECT.

I *KNOW* IT'S ME.

LET'S DROP THE NUANCE AND GET INTO SOME STRAIGHT UP VILLAINY.

I KNOW RIGHT WHERE TO START.

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FIRST, WE DEAL WITH THAT PRINCESS.

GASP!

ALARM!

YAR

UM...SO, I GUESS HER OFFICE IS THIS WAY, OR..

ACTUALLY, SHE MIGHT BE AT LUNCH.

ONE MAYBE LUNCH LATER

SARA, WE QUIT.

SHOCK!

SURPRISE!

YAR

YOU "QUIT"

YES. YOUR ROYAL ACCOUNTING TEAM IS NO MORE!

HOW CAN I PUT THIS...

LET THE CORNERIAN TREASURY FALL INTO RUIN WITHOUT OUR EVER-VIGILANT EYES. FISCAL UNCERTAINTY WILL UNDO YOUR PETTY KINGDOM!

I FIRED YOU GUYS ALREADY

LET THE GRIM SPECTRE OF...WAIT, WHAT? FIRED?

AGES AGO.

YOUR REPORTS.. THEY WERE, WELL, "AWFUL" WOULD IMPLY THAT THEY MADE ENOUGH SENSE TO BE JUDGED AS REPORTS AT A...

AND ONE OF YOU IS CLEARLY ILLITERATE

YAR

I WAS NOT INFORMED THAT OUR SERVICES WERE NO LONGER REQUIRED.

EXIT.

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AND WHY DID YOU NEGLECT TO TELL US THAT WE HAD BEEN FIRED, GARLAND?

I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE BAD FOR MORALE.

WHO'S BEEN PAYING US?

YO.

WHAT ABOUT ALL THE WORK THEY HAD US DO?

THEY WERE WORD PROBLEMS FROM OLD TEXT BOOKS.

THAT'S WHY THE QUARTERLY REPORT FOUND OUT HOW TALL SALLY WAS IF JOHN WAS FOUR INCHES TALLER THAN THE AVERAGE HEIGHTS OF SALLY, JOHN, AND PAUL!

I HAD TO FIND SOMETHING FOR US TO DO SO YOU WOULDN'T GET SUSPICIOUS.

FORGET IT. IT DOESN'T MATTER.

- I'M IN CHARGE NOW, AND THINGS ARE GOING TO BE A LITTLE DIFFERENT. BY WHICH I MEAN -- VERY. --

DIFFERENT, THAT IS.

AND WE'RE GOING TO *START* BY GETTING BACK TO BASICS.

YAR TECHNICALLY, WE BE STARTING BY GETTING TOLD BY THAT SARA PRINCESS WHAT THAT WE WAS FIRED

OKAY. NOT ONE OF OUR PROUDER MOMENTS, I'LL ADMIT.

THAT WAS A PRACTICE START. THIS TIME, IT'S FOR -- REAL. --

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OKAY I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF YOU THROWBACKS STINKING UP MY CAVE.

BE GONE

WE'RE NOT GOING ANYWHERE UNTIL WE GET SOME REWARDS.

WHAT I HATE MOST ABOUT TALKING TO YOU JERKS IS THAT I ALWAYS KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO SAY

PARTLY BECAUSE I EXIST IN SIX DIRECTIONS IN TIME AT ONCE, BUT ALSO YOU ARE ALL STUPID

REWARDS, REWARDS, REWARDS.

OKAY, SHUT UP, FINE

YOUR REWARD IS... IN ANOTHER CASTLE

ANOTHER *CASTLE*

AFTER ALL WE'VE DONE, HE WANTS US TO GO TO ANOTHER CASTLE?

YES, AND QUICKLY

WE MUST BE ON TO SOMETHING! THEY ALWAYS STICK YOU WITH UNNECESSARY BACKTRACKING WHEN THE QUEST REWARD IS AN ITEM OF INCREDIBLE POWER!

OR, ALTERNATIVELY, WHEN IT'S USELESS, OR SOMETIMES THEY DO IT AT RANDOM FOR NO REASON AT ALL

SO, IT COULD BE ANY-THING.

I LIKE THOSE ODDS.

CAN I REQUEST A *DIFFERENT* CASTLE?

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castle (**tem**-puhl) - noun: Where the goddamn Light Warriors are going.

SO, HOW DO WE GET THERE?

THAT'S EASY

NO.

NO, NO, NO. NO

PROBLEM?

HE IS GOING TO MAKE US USE A DEATHTRAP AGAIN.

NO, NO, NO. THOSE ARE A THING OF THE PAST

I DON'T BELIEVE IT.

YOU WANT TO KILL US.

DON'T BE STUPID. IF I WANTED TO KILL YOU, YOU'D KNOW IT AND YOU'D BE DEAD.

SO, WHEN WE WALK OUT OF THIS CAVE, WE WILL NOT SEE A DEATH-TRAP...?

YOU HAVE MY GUARANTEE.

PROMISE?

DOUBLE PROMISE.

I HATE THIS JOB

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SARDA: SCREW YOU AND THE HORSE YOU RODE IN ON.

WHAT HE MEANT TO SAY IS THAT WE HAVE SOME RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE MEANS OF TRAVEL YOU SO GRACIOUSLY DONATED TO US.

WHAT, YOU DON'T LIKE FAST AND SAFE TRAVEL?

NO, IT'S MORE THAT WE DON'T LIKE CLIMBING INTO FLYING COFFINS.

THAT'S NOT FAIR. THE OLD AIRSHIPS I GAVE YOU *HARDLY* "FLEW"

THEY JUST MISSED THE GROUND A SOLID SIXTY PER-CENT OF THE TIME.

WHAT WE TAKE ISSUE WITH IS THE OTHER FORTY PER-CENT

WHICH IS *STATISTICALLY* NOT EVEN HALF THE TIME!

CRYBABIES.

THAT... OKAY, BUT THAT DOESN'T REALLY INVALIDATE OUR WORRY

LOOK, I TOLD YOU, *THIS* ONE IS FINE.

YOU SAID THAT ABOUT THE OTHER ONES TOO.

OBVIOUSLY, I LIED.

BUT, RIGHT, SO, HOW CAN WE TRUST YOU?

BECAUSE I TOLD YOU TO. THIS IS REALLY EASY, GUYS.

GEE, THANKS FOR CLEARING THAT UP FOR US, SARDA.

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EVERYTHING CHECKS OUT ON THE PRE-FLIGHT THIS THING MIGHT ACTUALLY BE KINDA SAFE.

WHAT MAKES *YOU* QUALIFIED TO MAKE THAT KIND OF JUDGEMENT?

MASTERY OF ANIMAL HUSBANDRY, OF COURSE.

WHY IS THAT YOUR ANSWER FOR EVERYTHING?

HOW IS THAT YOUR ANSWER FOR EVERYTHING?

THERE IS NO PROBLEM THAT CANNOT BE OVERCOME BY AN IMAGINATIVE AND VIGOROUS USE OF THE ANIMAL HUSBANDRY SKILL.

YOU HAD TO USE "VIGOROUS" IN THERE. DIDN'T YOU.

I'VE GOT SKETCHES IF YOU'D LIKE TO SEE WHAT I MEAN.

OH, NO.

WE'RE DONE WITH THIS TOPIC. *BEYOND* DONE.

HEY.

YOU'RE A ROBOT

WARMECH, ACTUALLY.

NOPE. THAT DID IT I QUIT.

I CAN ONLY ACCEPT SO MANY IMPOSSIBLE THINGS IN ONE [redacted].

THE DEATHTRAP BEING SAFE, THAT AIR-SHIPS WORK *AT ALL*, AND HIS WHOLE ANIMAL SEX FETISH AS A REPLACEMENT FOR ANY FIELD OF KNOWLEDGE *THING* HAVE ALREADY STRAINED THAT LIMIT TO THE [redacted].

PEACE OUT!

WHO SAYS "PEACE OUT" ANYMORE?

SERIOUSLY.

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WHAT ARE YOU? SOME KIND OF BUTLERTRON? A DIPLO-MATIC? OR SOMETHING ELSE COMPLETELY HARMLESS AND SERVILE?

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT MYSELF?

LIKE I SAID, I'M WAR-MECH.

I USED TO GUARD THE SKY CASTLE UNTIL SOMEONE BLEW IT UP.

THIS CAME AS QUITE A SHOCK AS THE SKY CASTLE WAS THE PENULTIMATE ARTIFACT OF THE HIGH-TECH LOST CIVILIZATION THAT BUILT ME TO GUARD IT MANY CETURIES AGO.

HM, CAN I JUST INTERRUPT YOU THERE FOR A MOMENT?

SURE.

I SAW THAT CASTLE. HIGH-TECH, IT WASN'T

THAT'S JUST FOR SHOW.

NEO-MEDIEVALISM WAS ALL THE RAGE IN THE FINAL DAYS.

I FOUND IT TO BE INDICATIVE OF THE DECLINE IN GENERAL, TO BE HONEST.

ANYWAY, NOW I'M HUNTING DOWN THE JERKS WHO PUT ME OUT OF A JOB.

TO GIVE THEM CANDY, I HOPE?

NO.

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WARMECH, CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING?

SHOOT.

LET'S NOT USE THAT WORD

IF YOU WERE GUARDING THE SKY CASTLE, THEN HOW DID IT GET BLOWN UP?

ALSO, A *DRAGON* OWNED IT, I GUESS?

AFTER THE FIRST COUPLE *THOUSAND* YEARS OF GUARDING IT AGAINST *NOTHING* AT ALL, I GOT A LITTLE ... BORED, OKAY?

MAYBE I WANDERED OFF TO TAKE UP A HOBBY. LIKE TENNIS.

TENNIS?

I'M NOT ON TRIAL!

NO, IT'S JUST, I MEAN, IT'S NOT A *SOLITARY* GAME.

IT NEVER EXACTLY GOT TO THAT POINT ANYWAY. DO YOU SEE ANY ARMS ON ME?

AH.

SO, *MAYBE* IN MY SLIGHTLY INSANE QUEST TO INVENT AN ARTLESS ONE-PLAYER VERSION OF A GAME I KNEW NOTHING ABOUT, ONE OR TWO THINGS *MIGHT* HAVE SLIPPED BY ME.

LIKE...

EVERYTHING THAT LEAD TO THE CASTLE'S DESTRUCTION INCLUDING A TOTALLY HUGENORMOUS EVIL DRAGON?

HEY, IT'S A BIG CASTLE!

WAS A BIG CASTLE...

I'M NOT ON TRIAL!

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WELL, WE HAVE A NEW ENEMY

HOLD ON, I'LL UPDATE THE LIST

OH WAIT! IT *ALREADY* SAYS "EVERYONE IN THE WORLD."

IS THE LIST INVISIBLE FOR SECURITY REASONS?

PLEASE, GO ON.

WHATEVER YOU'RE SAYING ***CAN'T*** BE AS BAD AS WHAT FIGHTER ***WILL*** SAY

Y'K'NOW THE THEMATICALLY INAPPROPRIATE ROBOT FROM OUTSIDE? WEL...

"IT WAS NICE TO CHAT WITH YOU, BUT NOW I HAVE TO KILL YOUR BRAINS OUT."

BUT I'M TOO MIN/MAXED TO DIE!

CLICK

HMM.

CLICK CLICK CLICK CLICK CLICK

AND THAT'S MY BRILLIANT TALE OF VICTORY

SO, YOU ONLY SURVIVED BECAUSE HE FORGOT HOW TO USE HIS ATTACKS.

HEY, I DON'T WET MYSELF IN THIS VERSION.

NEXT TIME I TELL THIS STORY, I'LL ***ALSO*** SKIP THE PART WHERE I SAID THAT.

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SHOOOOM!!

AND THAT'S HOW WE ESCAPED WARMECH FOR-EVER.

OH, I'VE GOT A FEELING THAT WE HAVEN'T SEEN THE LAST OF HIM.

BECAUSE HE'S A PITILESS KILLING MACHINE THAT WILL HUNT US TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH?

EXCUSE ME, ARE YOU A WARRIOR OF THE LIGHT??

WHO'S ASKIN'?

LONG STORY SHORT, I'M TRYING TO KILL THEM. BUT THEY KEEP WALKING OFF ON ME.

LUCKILY, I KNOW EXACTLY WHERE THEY'RE GOING.

I'LL EVEN TAKE YOU THERE ON MY AIRSHIP FOR A LUDICROUSLY EXORBITANT FEE!

EXACTLY WHERE THEY'RE GOING IS EXACTLY WHERE I WANT TO BE.

BUT ALL I HAVE ARE INVALUABLE MILITARY TECHNOLOGIES OF A FORGOTTEN AGE.

WELCOME ABOARD!

YES.

THAT'S THE REASON WHY

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THE FLIGHT'S REMARKABLY SMOOTH. I'M IMPRESSED

WE HAVEN'T CRASHED OR DONE ANYTHING STUPID. IT'S KIND OF AMAZING, REALLY

HAVING A SOLID AUTO-PILOT AND WORKING PARTS CERTAINLY IMPROVES THE EXPERIENCE AS A WHOLE.

PARTLY. THAT'S IT

BUT PARTLY IT'S ALSO OTHER THINGS.

MEANWHILE, LOCKED IN STORAGE.

BUT WE OUGHT TO BE GOING FASTER

YEAH, I'M IN A HURRY TO GET OUR FINAL REWARD AND THEN BACKSTAB ALL OF YOU.

LITERALLY.

TO DEATH.

OKAY

'CAUSE, I MEANT IT IN A THRUST TO WEIGHT RATIO KIND OF WAY.

WELL, I WOULDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THAT!

I'M NOT SURE WHICH AWKWARD ADMISSION TO TACKLE FIRST...

FURTHER, WHY ARE THERE ENOUGH OF THEM FLOATING AROUND THAT I HAVE TO CHOOSE?

HEY, HIS AWKWARD ADMISSION DOOMS THE TEAM. *MINE* ONLY DOOMS THE WHOLE WORLD AND POSSIBLY NOT US.

THAT SOUNDED LESS DAMNING IN MY HEAD.

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OKAY, LET'S SEE IT

FIRST, I'D LIKE TO MAKE CLEAR THAT IN SHOWING YOU THIS, I ADMIT ***NOTHING AT ALL*** REGARDING WARMECHS THAT MAY BE RIDING OUR AIRSHIP

YES, FINE.

BUT HE PAID FOR HIS PASSAGE WITH ***THIS***.

HMM. A ***DATASPHERE*** AMAZING.

BUT WHY IS IT... Y'KNOW WHAT? ***NEVERMIND*** IT'S A SPHERE NOW, I CAN ACCEPT IT

I THOUGHT THESE WERE ONLY ***LEGENDS***.

IT STORES INFORMATION IN A SIX HUNDRED AND TWELVE DIMENSIONAL MATRIX.

THAT'S DATA ENOUGH TO ENCIRCLE THE UNIVERSE THREE AND A HALF TIMES.

AND WE DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW BIG THE UNIVERSE IS.

YOU HAVEN'T ***READ*** ANY OF IT, HAVE YOU?

NO, JUST ***LOOKING*** AT IT GIVES ME A HEAD ACHE.

GOOD.

READING A FRACTION OF IT SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO DRIVE A SANE MAN MAD.

WHAT ABOUT AN ***INSANE*** MAN?

HE'D BE TURNED ***SANE***, OBVIOUSLY OR KILLED

BLACK MAGE!

BLACK MAGE!

WHAT?

READ THIS FOR US. IT'LL BE WIN-WIN.

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WHAT? WHAT IS THAT? WHAT?

WELL, IT'S A SIX HUNDRED AND TWELVE DIMENSIONAL SPHERE RENDERED IN REAL SPACE.

NO, REALLY? WHAT ELSE CAN YOU TELL ME, *PROFESSOR*? IS THE SKY STILL UP? IS IT? *HMM*?

JUST LOOK AT IT, OKAY?

THINK IT WORKED?

HE'S *BREATHING*, SO HE'S NOT DEAD

I THINK IT MAY HAVE SHUT DOWN HIS HIGHER BRAIN FUNCTIONS, THOUGH.

THEN WE'RE AGREED WE HAVE TO TEST IT ON FIGHTER NEXT

OH, YEAH. BIG TIME.

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HEY, WHAT'S UP WITH BLACK MAGE?

NOTHING.

PROBABLY NOTHING.

I DUNNO. SEEMS MORE LIKE SOMETHING.

I BET HE DIDN'T LOOK AT THE BOX.

RIGHT JUST LOOK INTO IT.

HMM.

KINDA SHINY

SO.. IS IT WORKING, OR WHAT?

IT MAY BE THAT HE'S SO SLOW-WITTED THAT IT WILL TAKE A WHILE FOR HIM TO REALIZE HIS BRAIN'S BEEN FRIED

WHO WE TALKIN' ABOUT?

NO ONE!

PROBABLY NO ONE!

WELL, THIS THING *IS* COOL, BUT YOU SHOULD BE MORE CAREFUL WITH IT

IT SEEMS TO CONTAIN DETAILED PLANS FOR EVERY POSSIBLE WAY TO BUILD EVERY POSSIBLE DEVICE TO DESTROY EVERY POSSIBLE THING IN ALL CREATION.

HUH. CAN'T IMAGINE HOW THEIR CIVILIZATION MANAGED TO ANNIHILATE ITSELF

HEY, I KNOW! WHO CARES?

GOOD POINT. HISTORY CAN'T REPEAT ITSELF, BECAUSE THAT WOULD BE A TIME TRAVEL PARADOX.

AND BESIDES WE'RE *CRAZY* RESPONSIBLE.

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THIS IS NOT HOW I REMEMBER IT

KITTEN TEMPLE OF FIENDS RESCUE

THE DAY BEFORE...

I DON'T WANT TO BE A GLOOMY GUS, BUT ISN'T ANYONE ELSE WORRIED ABOUT HOW OUR HUMBLE HANGOUT TRANSFORMED WHILE WE WERE OUT?

I PREFER TO THINK OF IT AS THE ARCHITECTURE UPDATING ITSELF TO REFLECT MY RISE TO POWER.

YOU FIND COMFORT IN THE IDEA OF A SENTIENT BUILDING?

THIS IS A TEMPLE *DEDICATED* TO EVIL.

- IT'S BUILT ON THE DESECRATED ANCIENT BURIAL GROUND WHERE OTHER *MORE* ANCIENT DESECRATED BURIAL GROUNDS WENT WHEN THEY GOT EVIL STUFF BUILT ALL OVER *THEM.* -

- THE ARCHITECT WAS A NECROMANCER AND THE CONTRACTOR WAS IN THE ELDRITCH MAFIA

LET'S FACE THE FACTS.

- WHICH TOGETHER EXPLAINS HOW THE CORPSES FROM ALL THE DESECRATED BURIAL GROUNDS WERE ANIMATED TO BUILD THE TEMPLE USING THEIR OWN REMAINS IN THE MASONRY.

FRANKLY, WE'LL BE LUCKY IF THE ARCHITECTURE IS *ONLY* SENTIENT.

IT COULD ALSO BE FILLED WITH RAGE. OR CRAZY.

- OH, I HOPE NOT. WHAT ABOUT OUR PET SHELTER?

YEAH, WE'RE KIND OF PHASING THAT OUT.

KITTEN TEMPLE OF FIENDS RESCUE

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OKAY, WE KNOW WHAT WE HAVE TO DO NOW.

HOLD IT WEREN'T YOU COMATOSE?

I WAS.

THEN I USED MY BRILLIANCE ON IT!

EARLIER...

IT'S TOO BAD YOU'RE IN A COMA WHEN THERE'S A MAGAZINE FILLED WITH HUGE KNOCKERS RIGHT HERE.

GIMME, GIMME, GIMME!

1 inch = 6 miles

YOU'RE A SON OF A BITCH.

ANYWAY WE SHOULD LAND AT THE TOP, CRUSHING A COUPLE OF FLOORS, AND THEN KILL OUR WAY DOWN.

AREN'T WE HERE TO PICK UP A REWARD?

IN SOME WAYS, THIEF, YOU AND I ARE VERY DIFFERENT

WE'LL LAND IN A FIELD BECAUSE THAT IS HOW THE PROS DO IT

AUTO PILOT

AGE

DISENGAGE

ALSO, IT'S HOW THE AUTO-PILOT DOES IT AND I'M AFRAID TO TURN IT OFF

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WHEW! THANK GOD FOR THAT AUTOPILOT, I'D HATE TO HAVE LANDED IN A CREEPY EVIL FOREST!

WELL, LUCKILY WE HAVE A CREEPY EVIL ELF WHO CAN LEAD US OUT

I'M NOT *CREEPY*

UH. OR EVIL.

ANYWAY! I'M GOING TO SCOUT AHEAD WHILE NOTHING BAD AT ALL HAPPENS BACK HERE.

WELL, AT LEAST YOU ALWAYS KNOW WHERE YOU STAND WITH THIEF.

YEAH, AT THE EDGE OF A VERY HIGH CLIFF

NO, BLACK MAGE, THIS IS A *FOREST*

THIS IS WHY I HATE YOU.

WE HAVE UNFINISHED BUSINESS.

THIS IS WHY I HATE EVERYTHING ELSE IN THE WORLD TOO.

AND IT'S THE BUSINESS OF ME KILLING YOU. UH, DEAD. FOREVER.

GET IN LINE *WARBLECH.*

WAIT, THAT'S NOT QUITE HOW MY NAME IS PRONOUNCED.

I'M SORRY, *BOREMECH.*

IT'S EVEN LESS ACCURATE THAN *BEFORE!* THAT'S NO ACCIDENT!

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I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT WORKED

WHAT ARE YOU *TALKING* ABOUT? MY INCREDIBLE TAUNTS HAVE BEEN THE DOWNFALL OF OUR FOES.

ALL OF THEM?

ALL OF THEM WHO WEREN'T DEFEATED BY SOMEONE ELSE.

OR WHO DIDN'T JUST WANDER AWAY

OR WHO DIDN'T DEFEAT THEMSELVES.

OR WHO FELL TO PURE RANDOM CHANCE.

THAT PUTS YOU SOMEWHERE BETWEEN ZERO AND *ONE*

YOUR FACTS AND NUMBERS ARE MEANINGLESS IN THIS RIDICULOUS WORLD OF MAGIC

ASS.

PARDON ME. OK

OH, LORD. WHY DOES THE ROBOT HAVE A MUSTACHE?

I BREW IT WITH MY HUMAN LIP.

IS. IS THAT A FACT?

OH, YES. I LOVE TO GROW HAIR ALL OVER MY BODY IN BETWEEN ACTS OF DEFECATION.

WELL, HE *SOUNDS* HUMAN.

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LOOK, WARMECH ISN'T HUMAN!

"WAR-MECH"? WHAT A RIDICULOUS NAME!

I FEEL SORRY FOR HIM WITH MY HUMAN ARRAY OF EMOTION.

ONE THAT CAN BE MOCKED WITH MINIMAL EFFORT, PROBABLY!

ER...WHOEVER HE IS.

RIGHT OF COURSE

EXCELLENT, EVERYONE'S STORY CHECKS OUT. WE'RE ALL BEHAVING RATIONALLY.

CASUAL CHANGE OF TOPIC: WHAT ARE YOUR WEAKNESSES?

ACTUALLY

COULD YOU REPHRASE YOUR QUESTION IN THE FORM OF NOT THAT QUESTION AT ALL?

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CAN WE HAVE A MOMENT? THANKS.

Y'KNOW, WE'RE STEREOTYPICAL FANTASY HEROES IN A DARK FOREST TAINTED BY THE FORCES OF DEATH.

A ROBOT IS NOT EVEN ***CLOSE*** TO THEMATICALLY APPROPRIATE.

WHAT IF HE'S AN UNDEAD ROBOT?

HOW WOULD THAT WORK?

IF HE'S FUELED BY BLOOD

NOPE, WE'RE DONE HERE.

AND YOU.

YOU SHOULD KNOW BETTER THAN TO ***ENCOURAGE*** H.M.

NO, IT'S TOO LATE.

ALL I CAN THINK OF NOW IS HOW A ROBOT COULD EVER BE UNDEAD

HE GETS BITTEN BY A ZOMBORG, DUH.

THAT DOES ***NOTHING*** WHATEVER TO ADDRESS THE CENTRAL QUESTION, AND YOU GODDAMN KNOW IT!

LOSING FOCUS.

WE'RE OVERTHINKING THIS.

WARMECH IS LOOKING THE OTHER WAY AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, HE'S AN IDIOT.

TO BE FAIR, IT'S POSSIBLE HE WAS ONLY DRIVEN INSANE FROM CENTURIES OF ISOLATION AND BOREDOM.

TO BE ***REALLY*** FAIR, WHO GIVES A DAMN?

ALL ***WE*** HAVE TO DO IS TO ***WALK AWAY***

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ONE HOUR LATER...

WOW. SO THIS PLACE IS CREEPY

TEMPLE OF FIENDS

THAT'S NOT SURPRISING.

THIS IS A WOUND UPON THE FACE OF ALL CREATION.

EVIL IS A PRESENCE HERE.

THE GEOMETRY OF THESE TWISTED HALLS PULLS IT OUT OF THE AIR

DISTILLS IT GIVES IT MOTION.

GIVES IT *INTENT.*

AND, GENTLEMEN, IT SEEKS A VESSEL

DOES NOT

DOES *SO.*

THIS IS A STANDARD TEMPLE OF HATE AND NIGHTMARES. THERE'S NOTHING FANCY GOING ON.

WELL, OF COURSE *YOU'D* SAY THAT

YOU'RE PROBABLY PLOTTING TO USURP THE ENGINE OF EVIL THAT *IS* THIS PLACE TO EMPOWER YOURSELF WITH THE NAMELESS *THINGS* OUTSIDE TIME THAT CLAW AT THE FRAYED EDGES OF REALITY

WELL, OKAY, *NOW* I AM.

DAMMIT FRACTACTICAL GENIUS, CAN'T YOU EVER BE TURNED OFF?

MEANWHILE

TUM DA DUM...

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LOOK, IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW MUCH SPRUCING UP THEY DO, I REFUSE TO BE SCARED OF THIS PLACE

IT'S STILL GARLAND'S CLUB HOUSE

LET'S JUST THINK ABOUT *THAT* FOR A BIT, OKAY

ABOUT THE MOST DANGEROUS THING WE'LL EVER FIND IN HERE IS A STAIRWELL WITHOUT ADEQUATE *RAILING*

BLARG! I'M a DRAGON!

OR twelve!

IMPOSSIBLE! ONLY A MAXIMUM OF NINE ENEMIES MAY BE ONSCREEN!

fuck you.

RUN

ARGH!

SON OF A--!

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THAT WAS CLOSE.

THANK GOD THE LEAD DESIGNER HAD THE GOOD SENSE TO MAKE DRAGONS TOO LARGE TO FIT IN NARROW STAIRWAYS.

AND ALSO THAT WE FOUND ONE SO FAST DUE TO OUR RAMPANT COWARDICE

SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT

IS IT THE UPSIDE-DOWN ROOM? BECAUSE THE ROOM IS UPSIDE-DOWN.

I *TOLD* YOU! TWISTED GEOMETRY

NO, THIS ISN'T TWISTED IT'S *UPSIDE-DOWN*

YOU AREN'T GOING TO DRAW OUT ANCIENT AND MALEVOLENT FORCES OF THE UNDERVERSE WITH AN UPSIDE-DOWN ROOM.

SO HOW *DO* YOU DO IT?

NOT THAT I KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT THAT...

BUT YOU START WITH PARALLEL LINES THAT *INTERSECT* AND YOU GO FROM THERE.

BUT THIS PLACE? I MEAN, A CARNIVAL HOUSE OF MIRRORS IS BETTER ABLE TO WARP REALITY IT CAN AT LEAST MAKE YOU DIZZY.

NOTE: VERY FEW ELDER GODS HAVE ERUPTED FROM CARNIVALS.

MOSTLY, IT'S JUST PEDOPHILES.

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AT LAST!

OUR LONG, HARROWING TRAVELS ARE AT AN END!

YES, LONG AND HARROWING, I'M SURE

LIKE BILLIONS OF YEARS *ALONE*, ADRIFT IN INFINITE FROZEN DARKNESS.

ACTUAL

NOTHING BUT HATE TO REMIND YOU THAT YOU'RE STILL ALIVE.

AN ORDEAL THAT DESTROYS YOU ONLY TO REBUILD YOU ONLY TO DO IT ALL OVER AGAIN.

OVER AND *OVER* AGAIN.

UNTIL THERE IS NOTHING LEFT TO DESTROY NOTHING LEFT TO REBUILD

UNTIL THERE IS NOTHING BUT THE HATRED

FOCUSED INTO PERFECT *CLARITY*

LIKE THAT

BUT MOSTLY WE'RE JUST TIRED FROM WALKING SO MUCH.

HM. YES. THAT'S WHAT I MEANT

BOY WALKING, HUH?

THAT'S ROUGH.

YOU'LL PROBABLY WANT FOOD AND THAT, UH, THAT OTHER THING.

WATER

AND MEDALS. PRECIOUS MEDALS COMMEMORATING YOUR ABILITY TO PUT ONE FOOT IN FRONT OF THE OTHER FOR A LIMITED TIME.

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ARE YOU ONE OF THOSE ***NICE*** MONSTERS I KEEP HEARING ABOUT?

OH, LORD NO. I'M A GAS DRAGON.

IS THAT... UH. IS THAT AS BAD AS I THINK IT IS?

NO, IT'S WORSE.

OH, HOW BAD CAN IT BE? WE'LL HOLD OUR BREATHS!

SURE, OKAY. Y'KNOW HOW MOST DRAGONS HAVE FIREBREATH ATTACKS?

WELL, IT'S LIKE THAT

ONLY IT'S NOT BREATH.

AND THERE'S NO FIRE BUT IT ***WILL*** FEEL LIKE YOU'RE ROASTING ALIVE.

MAYBE WE SHOULD GO BACK UPSTAIRS.

YOU'RE RIGHT. THE DOZEN DRAGONS UP THERE ***MUST*** BE FRIENDLY BY NOW

WHY ARE THERE SO MANY DRAGONS!

THEY'RE EXTINCT!

YOU'VE ***MET*** DRAGONS. A LOT OF THEM. WHY DO YOU KEEP SAY-ING THAT?

WISHFUL THINKING.

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SO, WE'RE SURROUNDED BY DRAGONS.

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE, AS A **NINJA** I CAN JUST BE OUTTA HERE

YEAH, THAT HELPS THE TEAM.

IT HELPS **PART** OF THE TEAM.

THAT IS TOTALLY TRUE!

SILENCE!

I'VE NEARLY COMPLETED MY **LATEST** BRILLIANT PLAN TO SAVE OUR LIVES.

DONE!

FIGHTER, DO AS THE CARD **COMMANDS**!

FIGHTER?

IT HASN'T SAID ANYTHING YET

TAKE THE CARD AND THEN **READ** THE CARD

'KAY

BLEEARG!

SHOULD HAVE PROBABLY TOLD BLACK MAGE TO GET OUT OF THE WAY

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WHAT DID YOU WRITE. ON THAT *CARD*

JUST THREE SIMPLE WORDS.

GLORIOUS CHAINSAW METHOD

THIS TELLS ME LESS THAN NOTHING.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND? YOU'VE MADE ME FORGET THINGS I DIDN'T EVEN *KNOW*

LOOK, IT MAKES PERFECT SENSE

FLIP IT OVER

MAKE YOUR SWORDS BECOME LIKE THINGS UNTO CHAINSAWS.

THIS TELLS ME EVEN LESS THAN BEFORE. BUT WITH MORE WORDS!

IT'S SIMPLE. THE CARD GAVE H.M AN IDEA HE'S TOO STUPID TO KNOW THAT HE CAN'T ACT ON.

WHAT I HATE ABOUT MY LIFE.

PART OF WHAT I HATE ABOUT MY LIFE IS THAT IT *IS* WORKING.

I TRIED TO SHOW THE DRAGON MY NEW TRICK, BUT HE EXPLODED

BODIES EXPLODE EVERY DAY THAT'S JUST SCIENCE FACT. FIGHTER

NOW RUN ALONG AND SHOW YOUR TRICK TO THE DOZEN DRAGONS UPSTAIRS.

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ARE THOSE SUPPOSED TO BE RADIANT CHAINSAW AURAS? THEY LOOK LIKE CRAP

BE GLAD IT WORKED AND THEY LOOK ..IKE ANYTHING.

WHERE DO ALL THESE DRAGONS COME FROM ANY-WAY?

THIS IS THE ENDGAME. ENDGAMES ARE AT LEAST 70% DRAGON.

DEMONS ARE ALSO FAIRLY POPULAR

IF WE'RE ..UCKY, WE'..L ONLY BE FACING DEMONS DEDICATED TO THE USUAL STUFF

Y'KNOW PAIN, DARKNESS, ANGER

AS OPPOSED TO..?

URINE. OR BAD HAIR CUTS.

I DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU GET YOUR INTEL, BUT I'VE DEALT WITH A ***LOT*** OF DEMONS OVER THE YEARS AND I'VE NEVER HEARD OF A ***URINE*** DEMON.

OKAY, WELL APPARENTLY ONE OF US ONLY DEALT WITH WUSS DEMONS.

YOU ***HONESTLY*** THINK A BAD HAIRCUT DEMON IS HARDCORE, DON'T YOU.

YOU BE THE JUDGE

WHY DO YOU.

..CARRY THIS..

SUCH HORRIBLE MAGNIFICENCE.

I YEARN TO LOOK AWAY, YET I DARE NOT DO SO!

AND THIS IS WHY, IF WE'RE ***LUCKY***, WE'LL ONLY FIND DEMONS WHOSE MAD BABBLING TURN YOUR BONES TO DUST

GUYS? I RAN OUT OF DRAGON.

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I GUESS BLACK MAGE IS OUT

NO BIG LOSS, REALLY

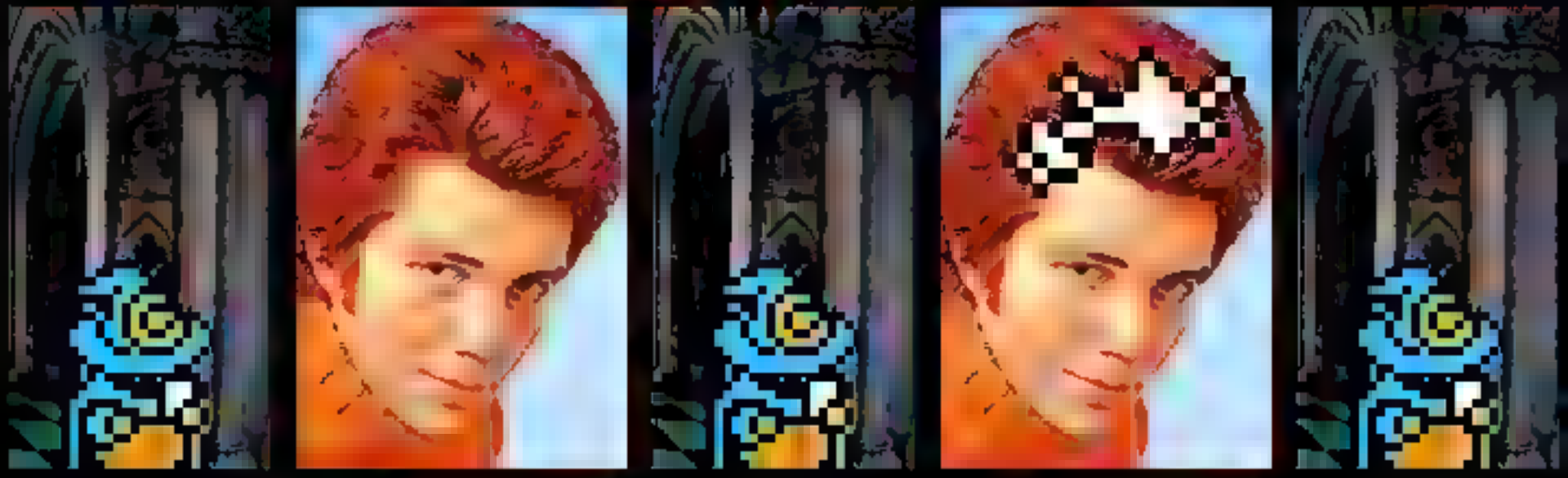
GOOD THING WE'RE HERE TO HELP HIM.

YES. IT IS A GOOD THING. LEAVING HIM TO ROT WOULD BE WRONG.

SO VERY WRONG.

KIND OF *CHAINSAW* WRONG.

OKAY, GOOD THING WE'RE ALL ON THE SAME PAGE THEN!



WELL, I'LL NEVER SLEEP AGAIN.

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SARDA? I COULDN'T HELP BUT NOTICE THAT *YOU'VE* GOT THE AIR ORB.

THAT'S A LIE YOU'RE A LIAR

NO, IT'S RIGHT OVER THERE

IN THIS VERY ROOM, OUT IN THE OPEN, WITH THE OTHER ORBS. *THERE*

AH THAT AIR ORB.

I DON'T MEAN TO BE A BOTHER, BUT IT'S KIND OF TECHNICALLY MINE.

GOSH.

SARDA, HAVE YOU SEEN DRAGOON?

NEVER HEARD OF HIM.

NO, UH, HE WAS THAT NICE YOUNG *ARMORED* FELLOW.. ?

OH, HMM. YES. I SENT HIM TO A PLACE LIKE THE BEACH.

ONLY IT WAS THE *MOON*.

THIS IS HARDLY A CAVE AT A...

I...OKAY

I DON'T KNOW HOW TO *RESPOND* TO THAT

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UGH, I'M TIRED OF WALKING.

WHY CAN'T WE DO WHAT WE ALWAYS DO? JUST LEAVE A SMOLDERING CRATER AND CALL IT A DAY?

JUST ONCE I'D LIKE TO GO SOMEWHERE WITHOUT KILLING EVERYONE IN THE WORLD.

HEY, I DON'T KILL THE PEOPLE, I JUST MAKE THE EXPLOSIONS THAT KILL ANYTHING NEARBY

WHATEVER, THERE'S TREASURE IN HERE

I HAVEN'T GROSSLY PROFITED IN HOURS.

WE'RE NOT CRATERING ANYTHING.

WELL, YOU'RE ALL A BUNCH OF BABIES.

NOW, I'M GOING TO HOLD MY BREATH UNTIL I GET MY WAY

HAVE FUN WITH THAT

THAT'S NOT AT ALL THE REACTION I WAS HOPING FOR

SKREE

HEH. KINDA CUTE.

AWWW. HIMS GOT FWIENDS.

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WE ARE THE FIVE LOST SKY WARRIORS!

YOO YEARS AGO WE BATTLED AGAINST THE CAUSE OF THE WORLD'S DESTRUCTION.

HELP! THE FIENDS' CURSE TURNED US INTO BATS. WITH THE ORBS SHINING ANEW, ONCE AGAIN WE CAN SPEAK!

ARE YOU GETTING ANY OF THIS?

I AM SO ***BEYOND*** TIRED OF DRAGONS ALREADY. WHAT ABOUT A NICE JUICY DIRE BADGER? OR A SLIME?

OOH, OOH! HOW ABOUT A COMPROMISE? LET'S SAY SOME KIND OF A ***SLIME DRAGON!*** HMM?

NOT HELPING.

I'M PRETTY SURE THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE

I ***AM*** A HELPER

LET'S JUST KILL IT AND MOVE ON.

UH, WE DON'T STAND A ***CHANCE*** ACCORDING TO MY CALCULATIONS.

MAKE FIGHTER DO THE CHAINSAW THING AGAIN.

HE USED ALL HIS ESSENCE

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT COULD MEAN.

NEITHER DOES HE, REALLY

WHATEVER MAGIC ITS FACE OFF WHILE I KNIFE ITS BELLY WIDE OPEN.

I ONLY HAVE ICE SPELLS AND I ***THINK*** THIS GUY IS A FROST DRAGON.

I'M LIKE 80% SURE

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GUYS?

I NEED YOU TO FOCUS HERE.

HE COULD TURN US HUMAN AGAIN, BUT YOU'RE TOO BUSY DRAINING HIS BLOOD JUST ..IKE ..LIKE

...IKE MONSTER BATS.

GREAT THAT'S GREAT. THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I NEED ***GREAT***

WE ALL LOOK THE SAME ..IKE THIS. I'VE BEEN HANGING OUT WITH MONSTER BATS FOR WHO KNOWS HOW ..ONG!

MY FRIENDS ARE PROBABLY ***DEAD***, AND NOW I'M DOOMED TO BE STUCK IN THIS FORM FOREVER, AND I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO TELL THE DESTINED WARRIORS OF LIGHT HOW TO DEFEAT THE FORCES OF CHAOS.

UNLESS..OF ***COURSE***, IT'S SO S.MPLE!

UGH, SO NOW I'VE GOT THE STENCH OF BURNT ***BAT HAIR*** TO ..OOK FORWARD TO FOR THE NEXT WEEK.

HIDEOUS LITTLE CREATURES. PIGEONS OF THE SKY!

IT APPEARS TO BE USING A KIND OF BLIZZARD BREATH ATTACK

YEAH, I'M GONNA GO AHEAD AND MOVE UP THE FROST DRAGON PROBABILITY TO ABOUT E.GHTY-***THREE*** PERCENT

MAAAYBE EIGHT-FIVE.

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WE'RE DOOMED TO AN ICY ..UH... DOOM.

THAT SENTENCE KINDA GOT AWAY FROM YOU.

OUR ONLY HOPE IS THAT BLACK MAGE CATCHES UP TO US SOON!

AND THAT HE HASN'T SOMEHOW IMPROBABLY SQUANDERED ALL OF HIS FIRE MAGIC ON COMPLETELY FRIVOLOUS TARGETS.

DAH! MORE BATS! *BURN!*

ARGH, A FLY!

SOME DIRT!

I HAVE EVERY CONFIDENCE THAT OUR TEAMMATE WILL MAKE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO OUR EFFORTS AND CONTINUED SURVIVAL.

THIS IS HIS CHANCE TO SHOW US HE'S A HERO.

UH...

I HATE MY FRIENDS! *WEEE!*

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WELL, I CAN FEEL STAGE TWO HYPOTHERMIA SETTING IN. WE'RE DEAD

NOT NECESSARILY. I HAVE ONE LAST TRICK UP MY INCREDIBLY BRILLIANT SLEEVE

HUH. LOUSY JERKS FROZE *THEMSELVES*.

TAKES ALL THE *FUN* OUT OF IT

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LIFE IS GOOD

BUT WITHOUT FIGHTER, RED MAGE, AND THIEF TO TORMENT ANYMORE, A QUESTION OCCURS TO ME..

NOW WHAT?

GRANTED

LEAVING THEM HERE TO ROT FOREVER HAS A NICE RING TO IT

A FANTASTIC RING TO IT...

BUT WHAT'S THAT LEAVE ME TO DO WITH THE REST OF MY LIFE?

OKAY, THERE'S UNMAKING ALL OF CREATION, SURE

BUT IT'S NOT LIKE THESE JERKS WILL SUFFER THROUGH IT SINCE THEY'RE ALREADY FROZEN.

SO...I GUESS I HAVE TO LET THEM OUT?

...AS FOR MY SECOND ORDER OF BUSI...

HOLD IT.

WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?

I'D SAY I WAS JOINING THE WINNING TEAM, BUT THAT'D IMPLY THERE EXISTED A TIME WHEN I WASN'T ON TEAM EVIL.

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NO, WE CANNOT HIRE HIM. HE'S A LIGHT WARRIOR. WE HATE HIM SO MUCH! ARGH!

THE LEGEND CLEARLY STATES THERE ARE FOUR WARRIORS OF LIGHT.

RIGHT... NOW, WITH HIM HERE, THERE'S ONLY THREE OF THEM, THEREFORE THERE ARE NO LIGHT WARRIORS.

FOR THE RECORD? THAT'S INANE.

NO, IT BE MAKING THE MATHEMALOGICAL SENSE.

BIKKE. TWO TIMES TWO.

CANTALOUPE

THANK YOU FOR PROVING THE POINT I WAS ABOUT TO MAKE.

FURTHER, AS THERE CANNOT BE SHADOW WITHOUT LIGHT, THERE ARE NOW NO DARK WARRIORS EITHER.

GARLAND, YOU'RE NOT OUR LEADER, REMEMBER? YOU'RE NOT IN THE POSITION TO MAKE THIS KIND OF CALL ANY MORE.

BUT IF THE DARK WARRIORS ARE NO MORE, THEN YOU AREN'T IN CHARGE EITHER.

HE'S GOT A POINT

FRUITBAT, THOUGH HE BE YAR

HE SPECIFICALLY DOES NOT HAVE ANY POINT AT ALL!

GENTLEMEN, I HAVE A RADICAL PROPOSAL.

DON'T LISTEN TO HIM, HE'S THE ENEMY! THE PRINCE OF LIES!

LIES ARE JUST CREATIVE TRUTHS.

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NO. A THOUSAND TIMES NO, THEN *TEN THOUSAND* MORE TIMES *NO.*

A DEMOCRATIC ELECTION WITH COMPLETE TRANSPARENCY IS THE ONLY FAIR MEANS TO DETERMINE MEMBERSHIP IN THE *NEW* DARK WARRIORS.

THERE ARE *NO NEW* DARK WARRIORS!

OF COURSE NOT WE HAVEN'T VOTED YET

THERE'S NOTHING TO VOTE.

WE HAVEN'T DISBANDED!

DON'T YE BE *THINKING* YE CAN BE SILENCING MY VOICE!

PIRACY BE *STEEPED* IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS.

AREN'T PIRATES GANGS OF MURDERING BASTARDS WHO ARE BARELY KEPT IN LINE BY THREATS OF UNTHINKABLE CRUELTY BY THEIR CAPTAINS?

THAT'S RIGHT *DEMOCRACY*

THEY SAYS WHAT THEY WANTS TO DO, THEN WE DO WHAT I WANTS TO DO BECAUSE I GOTS THE POWER WHAT BE VETO.

THIS "VETO", IT'S A *PLANK*, ISN'T IT.

AYE!

THEN IT'S SETTLED, VOTES FOR ALL!

ONE VOTE LATER..

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H'OKAY.

LET'S SEE WHERE THIS TAKES US.

OKAY!

LET'S SEE WHERE THIS TAKES US!

GUESS - I COULD USE THE BONE SHATTERING STRIKE OF ANCIENT HORRORS TO BREAK THEM OUT.

SO, BAKE-SALE THEN?

I WAS THINKING MORE LIKE REDUCING THE WORLD TO ASH, REALLY

IF I HAD A SWORD,

OR IF THAT WAS BONG.

THAT'S GOING TO HURT TURNOUT.

WELL, IT'LL HURT A *LOT* OF PEOPLE.

ON THE OTHER HAND, THEY LOOK KIND OF COMFORTABLE IN THERE.

THAT'LL ABSOLUTELY RUIN OUR WRITE-UP IN THE NEXT BAKING MONTHLY.

OKAY, WE NEED TO TALK.

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I'M GOING TO HATE MYSELF WHEN THIS WORKS, BUT IT'S MY ONLY OPTION.

HOW DO YOU GET TWO HUNDRED CANADIANS OUT OF THE POOL?

SAY, "PLEASE GET OUT OF THE POOL."

SMASH

HOW DID THAT WORK?

I...BROKE THE ICE...

WHAT'S A CANADIAN?

NO, I TOTALLY *BELIEVED* HIM.

AND SO, THE FROST DRAGON TURNED INTO A DARK ELF, MORE OR LESS EXACTLY AS I MAY HAVE PLANNED

NO ONE BELIEVES YOU.

LET'S JUST GET THIS OVER WITH.

WAIT! THAT IS *NOT* HOW WE DO THINGS AROUND HERE, BUDDY

WHY WOULD IT BE?

FIRST WE HAVE TO ARGUE INCESSANTLY OVER SEMANTICS.

THEN ONE OF US HAS TO HURT ONE OR ALL OF US.

ALSO, YOU'RE A VILLAIN.

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AND IF THERE'S ONE THING LIGHT WARRIORS DO TO VILLAINS, IT'S KILL THEM ALL

THAT IS NOT REMOTELY TRUE, AND YOU KNOW IT

SOMEWHERE, IN THE COURSE OF OUR TRAVELS, A VILLAIN DIED WHEN WE WERE NEAR HIM.

THAT COUNTS THAT COUNTS *BIG TIME.*

THERE WAS THAT ONE STUPID DARK ELF

I BELIEVE YOU MEAN MY FATHER.

OKAAAAAY *AWKWARD*

LOOK. A LOT HAS HAPPENED SINCE YOU WERE FROZEN.

FOR STARTERS, I'M ON YOUR TEAM NOW.

DEMOCRATIC PROCESS?

YUP.

SEE? *THIS* IS WHY GOD INVENTED MONARCHIES AND PUT INHERENTLY SUPERIOR PEOPLE IN THEM.

DEMOCRACY GOT *YOU* INTO THIS TEAM.

NO, THE VOTING HABITS OF DULLARDS GOT ME INTO THIS TEAM.

FOUR MORE YEARS, FOUR MORE YEARS!

GOD *BLESS* THE CORNERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM.

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ARE WE READY?

FIGHTER!

WHAT UP?

LET'S START THIS AGAIN.

THEY CAN BE USED FOR TOOL MAKING AND HUGS.

WELL, I'M NOT AN **EXPERT**, BUT I'D SAY ARMS WERE EVOLUTIONARILY ADVANTAGEOUS TRAITS OF HIS ANCESTORS.

WHY IS DRIZZ'L ARMED?

WHY DOES DRIZZ'L HAVE **SWORDS** NOW?

HE ASKED FOR THEM.

USING TWO SETS OF SWORD-CHUCKS IS SLIGHTLY IMPOSSIBLE ANYWAY

HOW IS A THING ONLY SLIGHTLY IMPOSSIBLE?

WHY DO WE PARK IN A DRIVEWAY?

THESE ARE LIFE'S BIG QUESTIONS, RED MAGE, AND I DON'T CLAIM TO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS.

NO, OF COURSE YOU DON'T.

THAT'S WHAT BLACK MAGE IS FOR!

HE'S DEFINITELY A SOURCE FOR INFORMATION, YEAH.

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WE CAN'T TRUST HIM WITH WEAPONS. HE'S A BAD GUY

THAT'S THE SAME REASON YOU SAID WE COULDN'T TRUST BLACK MAGE WITH MAGIC, BUT WE HUNG OUT WITH HIM ALL THIS TIME

AND NOTHING BAD EVER CAME OF THAT

I'M NOT SURE HOW TO RESPOND TO THAT OR WHERE TO BEGIN.

AT LEAST WE COULD TRUST BLACK MAGE. IN THE SENSE THAT WE KNEW HE WAS ALWAYS UP TO EVIL.

BUT THIS GUY? WHO **KNOWS** WHEN HE'LL DOUBLE CROSS US!

HE'S A DARK ELF. **ALL** THEY KNOW IS TREACHERY AND HATRED.

SO, WHAT, WE'RE JUST REALLY TAN WOOD ELVES THEN?

I WON'T DIGNIFY THAT WITH A RESPONSE. ALSO, SHUT YOUR FILTHY LIAR MOUTH.

THIS ISN'T GETTING US ANYWHERE, GUYS.

WHAT HE'S **GONNA** GET IS A KNIFE IN THE [redacted].

WELL, THAT IS HOW YOUR PEOPLE GET THINGS DONE.

WELP IT'S GO TIME.

WE'VE MOVED FROM THE SEMANTICS PHASE TO THE INFLICTION OF POINTLESS AGONY PHASE

AWW, THAT WAS BLACK MAGE'S FAVORITE PHASE

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WE HAVE SOME CONCERNS REGARDING YOUR PROPOSED POLICY CHANGES.

CONCERN GETS GARLANDS STABBED IN THE THROAT

WELL, YES, THAT'S ONE OF THE CONCERNS, ACTUALLY.

WE'RE ENTERING INTO AN ENDLESS THROAT STABBING CYCLE HERE.

DON'T GET US WRONG, WE'RE QUITE PLEASED WITH THE *KILL ALL THE LIGHT WARRIORS* PART

BUT THE *KILL ALL THE DARK WARRIORS* PART, WELL, THAT WORRIES US A BIT.

I DON'T SEE HOW.

I THINK IT'S THE THING WHERE WE *ARE* THE DARK WARRIORS.

OH. THAT

YEAH.

WELL, YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT NOTHING THEN.

ALL DARK WARRIORS *WON'T REALLY* DIE.

FOR INSTANCE, I WILL LIVE TO CARRY ON IN YOUR NAME ONLY I'LL BE USING MY NAME

AND IF ANYONE ASKS, I'LL SAY I DIDN'T KNOW YOU, *BUT* I HEARD YOU WERE A HUGE PEDO-PHILE.

ONLY, THEY *WON'T* ASK BECAUSE THEY'LL BE DEAD TOO. SEE? IT ALL WORKS OUT IN THE END

HE'S *ALMOST* GOT A POINT.

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LOOK, THIS IS AWKWARD FOR ALL PARTIES INVOLVED. - JUST STAND DOWN, OKAY?

EXCUSE ME DRIZZ'L, IS IT?

UH, YOU KNOW IT IS.

IF ANY- ONE IS GOING TO TALK THESE MONSTERS OUT OF FIGHTING, IT'S ME

THE GENIUS.

IT'S ONLY LISTENING TO ME BECAUSE IT KNOWS WHO I AM.

I USED TO RUN THIS CASTLE.

- LIKE TEN MINUTES AGO. -

NOPE, SORRY.

MAYBE THIEF DOESN'T MIND YOU STOMPING ALL OVER HIS HAUGHTY ELF SHTICK, BUT I'LL DAMNED IF I LET YOU PULL OFF A CLEVER PLAN.

THEY'RE KIND OF *MY THING.*

ONE SIDE, FRESHMAN.

NOW THEN.

HE DIED AS HE LIVED COMPLETELY HATED

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AH-HA! THE HIDEOUS EYE THING HAS WALKED RIGHT INTO MY TRAP

HE—

IT.

IT HAS MADE A CRITICAL ERROR!

HEY, QUICK QUESTION.

DO YOU BELIEVE ANY-THING YOU SAY?

ALL OF IT. WITH-OUT QUALIFI-CATION.

EXCEPT FOR THIS:

GIVEN A VERY WIDE RANGE OF INTERPRETATIONS OF BOTH THE THINGS I SAY AND THE MEANING OF THE PHRASE "ALL OF IT".

I DON'T FOLLOW

LIES AREN'T TRUE, SO WHY WOULD ANYONE TELL THEM?

WELL, I BELIEVE THE THINGS RED MAGE SAYS.

THAT'S BECAUSE YOU DON'T POSSESS THE... UH... THE IMAGINATION TO CONSIDER THAT PEOPLE CAN LIE

I...

IT'S...

SO, TELL US ABOUT THAT CRITICAL ERROR, RED MAGE.

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ITS SOFT UNDERBELLY IS EXPOSED!

THAT'S NOT ITS UNDER-BELLY.

AND IT'S PROBABLY NOT SOFT.

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING EXACTLY?

WHEN I SAID IT WAS AN IT, THAT DIDN'T MEAN IT WAS *WITHOUT* GENDER.

AH. MORE OF AN *EXCESS* OF THEM?

UH, YES.

IT HAS THREE GENDERS. AND THE THIRD ONE IMPREGNATES OTHER SPECIES. LIKE YOU.

OKAY. THAT'S...THAT'S NOT SO BAD KINDA.

IT REPRODUCES ASEXUALLY. SO IT *CAN'T* RAPE ME.

THAT'S ALMOST TRUE.

OKAY. I'M CRYING NOW.

THAT'S A SHAME. EMOTIONAL SUFFERING ACTIVATES ITS MATING CYCLE *BIG TIME.*

DID RED MAGE MARRY A MONSTER?

SURE, WHY NOT. BUT IT'S PROBABLY BEST TO WRITE OFF RED MAGE AND JUST REMEMBER HIM AS HE WAS.

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IT LOOKS SOMETHING A WITTLE COMPLETELY DIFFERENT HERE.

IT'S THE *EVERYTHING* ACTUALLY

— YES, YES! EVERYTHING IS DIFFERENT. WHERE'S THE CLASSICAL COLUMNS AND PLEASING VIEW?

OUT THERE SOMEWHERE IN THE WORLD THAT WILL *BURN* WHEN WE SUMMON CHAOS INTO THIS PLANE.

ABOUT THAT.

— I WAS THINKING MAYBE WE WOULDN'T DESTROY EVERYTHING SO MUCH AS RULE OVER IT. Y'KNOW?

THAT'S NOT GOING TO WORK.

WE ALL WANT THE LIGHT WARRIORS DEAD, RIGHT?

THEY'RE REALLY A VIRUS. YOU CAN CURE AN INFECTION BY KILLING THE PATIENT, BUT SOME OTHER JERK WILL JUST GET A COLD ANYWAY

— IT'S HARD TO FOLLOW YOUR ANALOGY BECAUSE THAT'S NOT AT ALL HOW MEDICINAL PRACTICE WORKS.

DESTINY WILL MAKE *SURE* THERE ARE LIGHT WARRIORS.

IF YOU GET RID OF THIS SET, *MORE* OF THEM WILL CROP UP

AND, BELIEVE ME, THEY WILL BE *FAR MORE* QUALIFIED FOR IT

STOPPING LIGHT WARRIORS IS JUST LIKE CURING AN EPIDEMIC: YOU KILL *EVERYONE*

AGAIN, I'M NOT SURE YOU'RE ENTIRELY CLEAR ON WHAT IT IS WHITE MAGES DO.

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WHAR BE THE FLUTED COLUMNS?

FUNNY STORY

TURNS OUT YOUR WHOLE CASTLE HERE IS BUILT OUT OF THE STILL SCREAMING UNDEAD

OH, SURE THEY'VE BEEN FORGED INTO WOODEN PLANKS AND BRICKS SO YOU CAN'T HEAR THEM.

BUT THEY SCREAM, A LOT

ANYWHO, I'M KIND OF A NECROMANCER HOBBYIST.

NOT SURE WHO DID YOUR SET UP HERE, BUT IT WAS COMPLTELY UNSECURE

- I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS. -

IT'S NOT IMPORTANT ANYWAY.

THE POINT IS THAT I WAS FREE TO BIND THE TEMPLE TO MY WILL.

FIRST POINT OF ORDER WAS TO RENOVATE THE MEETING HALL HERE.

I MEAN, C'MON. JUST HOW MANY EVIL ORGANIZATIONS DISCUSS THEIR PLANS AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF A SUN-DAPPLED VISTA?

*MINE DID...

YEAH. HEY, WELCOME TO THE POINT

I LIKE IT. REMINDS ME OF WHAT I FEEL LIKE ON THE INSIDE, Y'KNOW?

THE WAY MY PARENTS DON'T UNDERSTAND

OKAY, I HATE IT NOW.

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THERE ARE ADVANTAGES TO A THREE-MAN TEAM.

I GUESS BUT AT WHAT COST?

THINK ABOUT IT NO MORE FOODS MADE ENTIRELY OF SHOES.

IS THAT LIVING?

YES.

IS IT?

YES.

MAYBE SO. BUT I REALLY LIKED IT

THE BIGGEST IMPROVEMENT FROM MY END IS THAT IT TAKES LESS PAPERWORK TO KEEP TWO TEAMMATES' WORTH OF BOOTY THAN THREE

WAIT, WHAT?

HM? OH, I PROBABLY DIDN'T SAY A THING.

IS THIS ONE OF THOSE CRUSHING KHEE'BLER 100 PERCENT - TAXES?

NOTHING LIKE THAT IT'S MORE LIKE FIFTY-SIX INDIVIDUAL TAXES.

BETWEEN THREE AND TWELVE PERCENT

EACH.

THIS IS WHY MY PEOPLE ARE REVOLTING.

SEE, I'M SO CLASSY I'M NOT GOING TO TOUCH THAT ONE.

OH. YOU SURVIVED

YEAH. TWO WORDS FOR YOU.

AN.MAL.

HUSBANDRY

I DON'T KNOW WHAT HE MEANS.

EOD. DO I ENVY YOU

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AND THANKS TO MY FRANKLY ***BRILLIANT*** ALLOCATION OF POINTS TO ANIMAL HUSBANDRY, I POSSESS A ***ROBUST*** AND INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF MONSTER GENITALS.

WE KNOW YOU ALREADY TOLD US.

TWICE

IT TAKES AT LEAST THREE TELLINGS TO FULLY UNDERSTAND MY GENIUS.

ANYWAY, THERE I WAS, MY MIND ***BUZZING*** WITH MONSTER GENITAL STATS.

DEAR LORD, ***HOW*** DO YOU DO IT?

THERE WERE SEVERAL CANDIDATE APPENDAGES.

SIMPLE. I DROWN HIM OUT BY NEVER REALLY LISTENING TO ANYTHING HE'S EVER SAID.

I MEAN HE'S HUMAN ANYWAY

EACH ONE MORE PRE- ISILE THAN THE LAST!

NO, I MEAN HOW WERE YOU EVER ABLE TO SURVIVE THIS LONG WITH, WELL, WITH ***THIS***?

SO I ***YANKED*** AND YANKED AS HARD AS I COULD OVER AND OVER AND OVER!

I MEAN, WHAT I HAD TO DEAL WITH FROM ***MY*** THREE, I THOUGHT IT COULDN'T BE ANY WORSE.

BUT... ***THIS***.

AND YANKING AND ***YANKING*** UNTIL MY ARMS WERE NUMB!

THAT'S NOTHING. YOU SHOULD SEE BLACK MAGE GO TO WORK.

IF HIS TREACHERY WOULD EVER HURT SOMEONE MORE THAN HIMSELF, I'D HAVE TO STOP H,M.

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AND JUST WHEN I THOUGHT I COULDN'T *YANK IT* ANY MORE, ITS ARM CAME OFF.

STOP *TALKING* ABOUT.. WAIT

ITS ARM?

YEAH. OR, I DON'T KNOW, A TENTACLE.

IT WAS A HUGE ORBULAR PHOTO-SENSATIVE ORGAN.

WHATEVER THOSE ARE CALLED

YOU MEAN ITS *EYE*

SURE, I GUESS.

TURNS OUT I'M NOT SO "*WITH IT*" ON MONSTER ANATOMY AFTER ALL.

BUT THE MONSTER IS NOTHING MORE THAN A SACK OF JELLY AND AN EYE!

HOW COULD YOU NOT IDENTIFY THE EYE? IT WAS THE ONLY PART WITH ENOUGH SHAPE TO BE NAMED.

I'D JUST DROP IT

BUT HOW COULD HE MISTAKE...

TRUST ME IT'S BETTER NOT TO DWELL ON THESE THINGS. THEY'LL ALWAYS BE DOING THEM. *ALWAYS*.

WHAT? WHAT'S EVERYONE LOOKING AT? IS IT MY HAIR? IT *IS* MY HAIR.

YOU GUYS WOULD TELL ME IF IT WAS MY HAIR, RIGHT?

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I FORGOT TO MENTION THAT THE GESTATION PERIOD IS ABOUT SEVEN MINUTES.

AND IT'S MORE TRANSORMATION THAN GESTATION. . .

I'M A MONSTER!

ON THE OTHER HAND, IT'S NOT SO BAD.

BET I GET EXTRA ATTACKS FROM THESE WIGGLY THINGS.

MAYBE I CAN TURN PEOPLE TO STONE BY LOOKING AT 'EM.

IS IT WORKING? HAVE I TURNED YOU GUYS TO STONE?

...YES.

SO COOL!

I THINK WHAT I HATE MOST ABOUT THIS IS HOW WELL HE'S TAKEN TO THE CHANGE.

WHAT I HATE MOST IS THAT HE STI... TALKS.

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I CAN'T BELIEVE, I'M SAYING THIS, BUT...

IS THERE A WAY TO CHANGE HIM BACK?

OOH, CHECK IT OUT I LEAVE A TRAIL OF SLIME!

HE'S SOMEHOW MORE UNBEARABLE LIKE THIS.

THAT'S A TOUGH CALL, REALLY.

WELL, I THINK IT'S SLIME

NOT THAT TOUGH A CALL, SUDDENLY.

IT'S DEFINITELY VISCOUS. NO DOUBTING THAT

MAYBE...

MAYBE WE CAN KILL HIM AND SAY WE MISTOOK HIM FOR A REAL MONSTER

HEY, WHAT'RE YOU GUYS TALKING ABOUT?

UM. FIGHTER

WHAT? YOU CAN'T KILL ME

FIRST OF ALL, IT'S NOT HEROIC TO TURN ON EACH OTHER. BESIDES, I'M A WORLD-CLASS SWORDER.

JUST WATCH WHAT A MESS I MAKE OUT OF THIS RANDOM MONSTER

WAIT

THAT WORKED OUT OKAY.

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I MUST GO NOW THE WORLD NEEDS ME.

DON'T WORRY SARDA IS A POWERFUL SAGE.

HE IS AS THE LIGHT AND HIS WISDOM WILL GUIDE YOU.

SO.

WANNA REPROGRAM REALITY?

I THINK I PROVED MY POINT

WHATEVER IT WAS.

IT WAS A THOROUGH POINT.

I GUESS I REMADE THE CASTLE TO MATCH MY TWISTED PSYCHE ENOUGH FOR TODAY

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? YOU ONLY CHANGED THIS ROOM.

HEY, I CHANGED OTHER ROOMS.

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WHEW GLAD THAT'S OVER

I WILL REGRET EVERY MOMENT OF THIS, BUT I DEMAND TO KNOW HOW YOU DID THAT

IT WAS QUITE SIMPLE REALLY

JUST A LITTLE TRICK I LIKE TO CALL POLYMORPH (SELF).

WHAT.

IT CAME TO ME IN A SLIGHTLY HALLUCINATORY FLASH THANKS TO MASSIVE BLOOD LOSS.

I COULD USE POLYMORPH (SELF) TO POLYMORPH ***INTO*** MY(SELF). GET IT?

I KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT MAGIC TO KNOW *THAT'S* EXACTLY HOW THAT MAKES NO DAMN SENSE AT ALL.

I ADMIT I MAY HAVE STRETCHED THE RULES A BIT EVEN FOR ME. BUT IT WORKED PERFECTLY, SO WHO CARES?

WELL, I'M NOT GOING TO ***COMPLAIN*** ABOUT PUTTING THIS LATEST HIDEOUS EPISODE BEHIND US.

C'MON.

SPLURG

WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT NOISE?

NOTHING!

SWAMP GAS!

WHATEVER IT WAS, I BET IT ***WASN'T*** A BACKLASH FROM GROSS ABUSE OF THE LAWS OF MAGIC!

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THE INSIDE OF GANDALF'S FRIDGE! AT LAST IT CAN BE TOLD!

they

KNOCK KNOCK

UGH.

WHO IS IT?

IT'S GARLAND!

OH. I'M NOT HERE, THEN!

I'M TOO!

FINE

MAKE IT QUICK. I'M BUSY

I WANTED TO DISCUSS...

WAIT. THIS IS YOUR ROOM?

ONE OF THEM. SO WHAT?

I HAVE A BED OF SPIKES!

YES, I MADE IT FOR YOU. THEY'RE QUITE COMFORTABLE, Y'KNOW

THERE'S TWO SPIKES. ONE AT MY NECK AND THE OTHER AT MY GROIN.

TO FOCUS YOUR CHAKRAS I GUESS?

ALSO? MY ROOM IS OUTSIDE.

UH, YEAH. FOR OTHER CHAKRAS.

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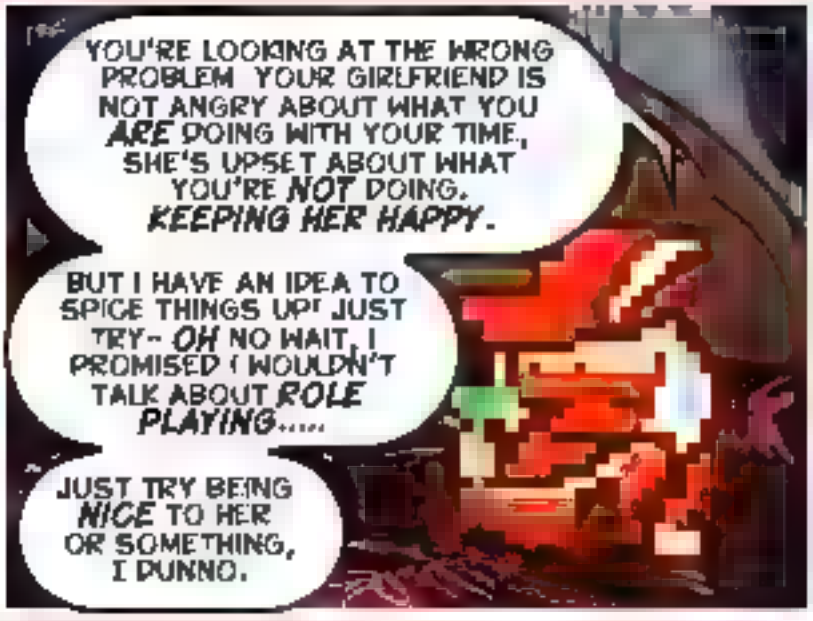
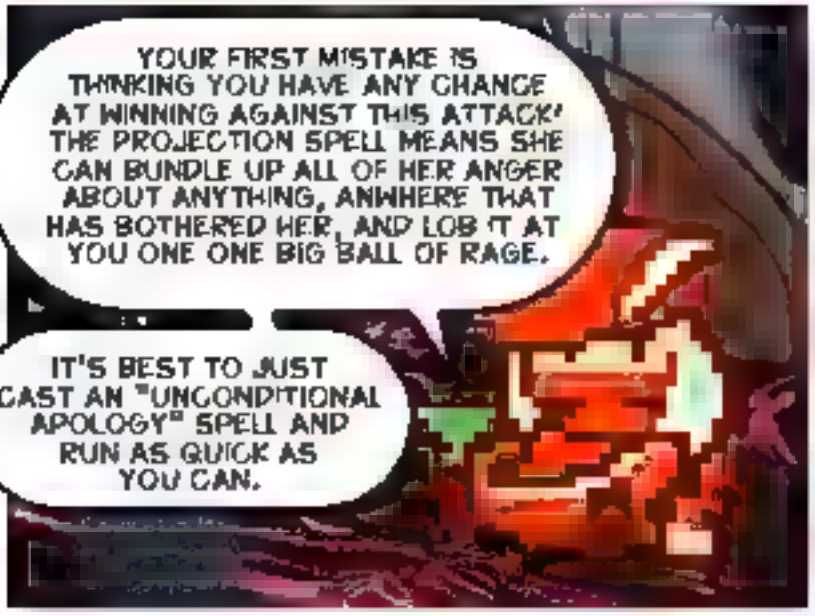
Red Mage's Love Lounge

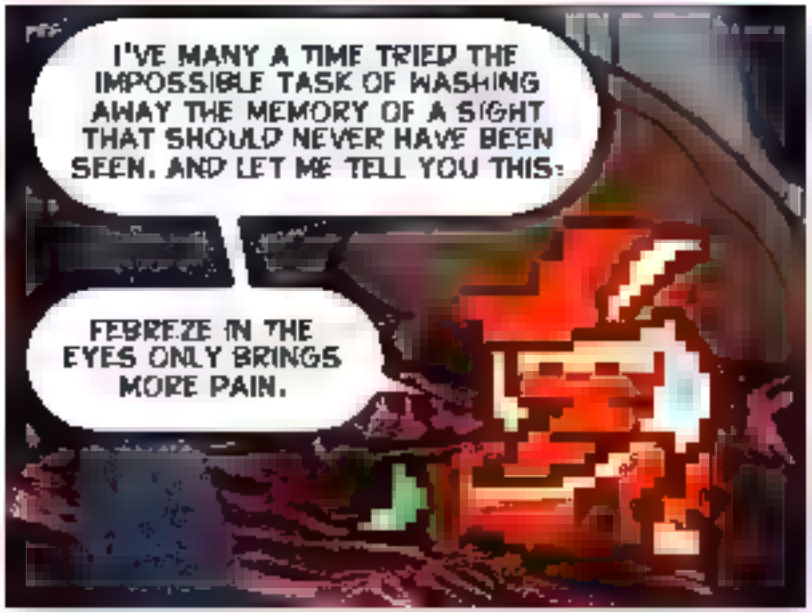
DEAR RED MAGE,
MY GIRLFRIEND AND I HAVE BEEN TOGETHER FOR A COUPLE OF YEARS NOW, AND SHE NEVER HAD A PROBLEM WITH ME PLAYING VIDEOGAMES BEFORE. BUT ALL OF A SUDDEN, SHE HAS BEEN GETTING ALL UP IN MY GRILL ABOUT HOW MUCH I PLAY! WHASSAT ABOUT?



HEY RED MAGE,
DON'T KNOW WHAT'S UP WITH MY GIRLFRIEND, MAN! EXPECT UNPROVOKED ATTACKS FROM GOLEMS AND OTHER MIDLESS BEASTS, BUT WHY'S SHE GOTTA ALL FREAK OUT ON ME AS SOON AS SHE WALKS IN THE DOOR!? YEAH, I KNOW YOU HAD A BAD DAY AT WORK, BUT GEEZ! HOW CAN I WIN AN ARGUMENT IF I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT SHE'S MAD ABOUT?

RED MAGE:
NOT ALL OF US ARE IN RELATIONSHIPS. WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR US SINGLE GUYS WHO WAKE UP IN THE MORNING TO FIND THAT OUR BEER GOGGLES HAVE FAILED US, AND WE'RE IN A COYOTE UGLY SITUATION?





Ryan Estrada

GUYS, COME IN HERE, YOU'VE GOT TO SEE THIS.

C'MON LET'S NOT DO THIS.

VAR WHAT BE THIS?

TSK THEY'RE GONNA TRACK *MUD* IN HERE.

THIS IS BUT ONE OF BLACK MAGE'S ROOMS.

I DON'T BE HAVIN' A ROOM!

I DO, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHERE IT IS.

DAMMIT, PEOPLE

YOU'RE AS BAD AS MY OTHER TEAM.

BIKKE, YOU HAVE A ROOM.

IT'S A *CAVE* FILLED WITH MOLTEN LAVA.

VIVI BERT, THERE'S DIRECTIONS TO YOUR ROOM ON THE BACK OF YOUR KEYCARD

LaGrange Terrace

$$r \approx R \sqrt[3]{\frac{M_2}{3M_1}}$$

A stable community

IS THIS FOR *CHAMPIONS*?

GLAD THAT'S ALL SETTLED

WE WANT REAL ROOMS THAT WON'T KILL US.

I CAN'T DO ANYTHING ABOUT *THAT*, GARLAND.

BUT YOU CONTROL THE TEMPLE WITH YOUR MIND!

AND I NEED FOUR LUXURY BEDROOMS TO DO IT WITH, THANKS.

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WHY DO THEY ALWAYS FILL DUNGEONS WITH MONSTERS?

YEAH, THAT WAS ALL ME. ...

-- THEY'RE ESSENTIALLY FODDER YOU HAVE TO TRUDGE THROUGH.

THEY SAP YOUR STRENGTH, SUPPLIES, AND MORALE. THEY TURN WARRIORS OF DESTINY INTO TIRED, FEEBLE MEN.

MOSTLY THEY JUST SMELL.

WELL, YES. GARLAND PROCURED MOST OF THEM FROM A DISCOUNT MONSTER BREEDER...

STILL. A RANK ODOR. THAT CAN BE DE-MORALIZING. RIGHT?

A LITTLE. I GUESS.

IF IT HELPS, THEY'RE PRETTY UGLY AND THAT MAKES ME KINDA SAD

THANKS.

HEY, DON'T FALL BEHIND.

WE CAN'T KEEP RESCUING YOU *FROM* YOURSELF EVERY TEN MINUTES, YOU KNOW

SPLAG.

WHAT'D YOU SAY?

NOTHING! SWAMP GAS!

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I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT THE LAST HOUR OF MY LIFE.

YEAH? I DON'T CARE

IT'S NOT BEEN A GOOD HOUR.

THAT'S A SHAME NOT MY PROBLEM.

SO FAR I'VE BEEN FORCED TO ENDURE TALES OF INTER-SPECIES... EVENTS.

AND THEN FORCED TO WITNESS THE RESULT.

YOU'LL NOTE THAT'S ALL FROM JUST ONE GUY

THIS OTHER ONE.

HIYA!

YOU HAVEN'T EVEN SEEN SOME OF THE CRAP HE GETS UP TO.

HE'S NOT AS DISGUSTING, OF COURSE, BUT IT HURTS YOU TO SEE IT ALL THE SAME.

AND AT LEAST HE KNOWS HE'S A MORON

SOCRATIC METHOD!

BLACK MAGE IS JUST AS BAD, BUT HE THINKS HE'S A GENIUS.

NO MAGE LEFT BEHIND

I THINK I'M GOING TO BETRAY YOU GUYS AT THE LAST MINUTE JUST OUT OF PRINCIPLE.

MAYBE SOONER.

JOIN THE CLUB, MAN.

HEL.., I WILL RAGE YOU.

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I DON'T WANT TO LIVE IN LAVA!

OR ON SPIKES?

OR IN AN ORBITAL POSITION FOR A STATIONARY SOLUTION OF THE CIRCULAR RESTRICTED THREE-BODY PROBLEM!

I LOOKED IT UP

POINT OF ORDER!

IF YOU DIDN'T WANT ME TO DESTROY EVERYTHING YOU LOVED AND WORKED FOR, THEN YOU SHOULD HAVE VOTED FOR THE OTHER GUY

BUT THIS IS THE MESS WE'RE IN NOW AND WE HAVE NO ONE TO BLAME BUT YOU.

DON'T WORRY, THOUGH. I AM NEARLY AS MAGNANIMOUS AS I AM CORRUPT.

I WILL FIX THIS HOUSING CRISIS.

HERE.

OKAY WHAT ARE THOSE?

IT'S A FICTIONAL NUMBER

WHAT ARE THESE FOR?

CHECKS!

"A ZILLION DOLLARS"?

IT'S A BAILOUT YOU'RE BAILED OUT BIG TIME.

THIS ISN'T MONEY. IT'S WORTHLESS.

SURE

THAT'S A NICE ROUND NUMBER

OH, I CAN FIX THAT LET'S MAKE IT *TWO* ZILLION.

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WHAR'D M'COMIC GO?

FOR THOSE OF YOU OUT THERE IN INTERNET LAND WHO DON'T FEEL THE NEED TO BRIGHTEN YOUR DULL LITTLE LIVES WITH THE SHINING WISDOM OF MY EVERY-OTHER-DAY BLATHER ON THE MAIN PAGE, MY COMPUTER IS DEAD. ALL MY IMPORTANT INFO WAS BACKED UP ELSEWHERE AND THE HARD DRIVE IN QUESTION IS FINE ANYWAY. IT JUST MEANS REGULARLY SCHEDULED COMICS WON'T BE TOO REGULAR UNTIL THE REPLACEMENT SYSTEM SHOWS UP.

THAT SAID, I THINK I CAN HAVE ONE FOR YOU FINE FOLKS THURSDAY.

OKAY, WE MADE IT.

DRIZZT?! IMPOSSIBLE!

HOW DID YOU GET PAST THE MONSTERS? OR OUR ARRAY OF TRAPS?

BY BEING THE GUY WHO WAS IN CHARGE OF MONSTER AND TRAP PLACEMENT BACK WHEN I WAS A DARK WARRIOR.

SEE, THIS IS WHY YOU WERE VOTED OUT

YOUR TRAP AND MONSTER PLACEMENT WAS SO LACK-LUSTER THAT OUR ENEMIES WALKED THROUGH THEM!

IT'S JUST INDICATIVE OF HIS WORK.

AS SLIP-SHODDY AS A SHODDY SLIP. YAR.

YOU CANNOT BE SERIOUS.

WE'VE GOT BLACK MAGE NOW. HE'S SO EVIL, HE'S GOT US LIVING IN SQUALOR.

AND LAVA.

FOR BASICALLY NO REASON!

WELL, IT'S OFFICIAL.

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO DETERMINE WHO'S STUPIDER THAN WHO.

EVERY TIME I *THINK* I'VE GOT IT LOCKED DOWN, SOMEONE SAYS SOMETHING, ANYTHING, AND I HAVE TO START OVER AGAIN!

DON'T YE TEMPT THE WRATH O' THE *CLAW!*

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CAN WE JUST DO A BIG EPIC BATTLE AND GET IT OVER WITH ALREADY?

THE CLAW DEMANDS BLOOD! ALSO, A SODA.

YEAH, THAT'LL WORK, BECAUSE WE TOTALLY BROUGHT DRINKS WITH US.

DON'T BE A MONSTER. DON'T BE A MONSTER.

OR I COULD JUST START SHOOTING BLINDLY INTO THE CROWD I'LL BE GLAD TO HIT WHOMSOEVER GETS HIT

DO YE HAVE THE MR PIBB?

GAAASP! HE PRONOUNCED IT WITHOUT THE PERIOD!

HE KNOWS.

VERILY, OUR TRAVELS AND TRAVAILS ARE AT AN END!

WAIT, WHO...

I SAY THEE GOOD DAY!

IT'S SO CROWDED YOU COULDN'T FIT A DRAGON'S ROAR BETWIXT US, EH SIRS?

I HAVE NO ONE TO BLAME BUT MYSELF FOR NOT BUILDING THIS TEMPLE OUT OF POISONOUS GASSES.

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HRRRRGH!

HYEEGRRGH!

WHO'S DOING THAT?

I'M WILLING THE TEMPLE TO CRUSH YOU ALL TO DEATH.

SHOULDN'T THAT ALSO KILL YOU?

HEY, I TOOK OVER HELL ONCE. DEATH WOULD BE A WELCOMED REPRIEVE

YOU HAVING TROUBLE TAPPING INTO THE NECRO-STRUCTURE?

YOU'RE STILL TALKING, SO OBVIOUSLY YES.

YEAH, MY SIGNAL WITH JESSIE IS PROBABLY THROWING YOU OFF

JESSIE.

LORD OF UNDEATH.

THE GOD OF UNDEATH HAS A NAME OF TWENTY-SEVEN SYLLABLES SPOKEN SIMULTANEOUSLY BY SIX EVER-SCREAMING MOUTHS.

YEAH, OR JESSIE TO HIS FRIENDS.

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YOU'RE AN ATHEIST!

YOU CAN'T BE FRIENDS WITH A BEING YOU DON'T BELIEVE IN!

ACTUALLY, IT MAKES THINGS WAY EASIER.

THEY KNOW I DON'T BELIEVE IN THEM, SO THEY KNOW I'M NOT SUCKING UP TO THEM.

IF I MAY INTERJECT

WHO ARE YOU AND WHY ARE YOU HERE?

WE ARE A TROUPE OF MERRY ADVENTURERS.

OH--EXCEPT BERSERKER.

PISH. I'D QUALIFY MYSELF AS SOMEWHAT MERRY

AH, BUT NOT WHILE BERSERKING THOUGH.

GREAT HEAVENS ABOVE, I SHOULD SAY NOT IN THAT CIRCUM-STANCE.

APOLOGIES, I SHOULD'VE BEEN MORE PRECISE

NOT AT ALL! I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN YOU MEANT ONLY TO ELUCID--

WHY ARE YOU HERE?

WELL, WE CAME ACROSS A MOST CURIOUS AND COMPLETELY HUMAN CHAP IN A DARK WOOD

UH, COMPLETELY HUMAN, YOU SAY?

YES, HE WAS VERY CLEAR ON THAT POINT. WHY?

BEHOLD MY HUMAN LASER!

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HUMANS DON'T *HAVE* LASERS.

YES. ME NEITHER.

BUT YOU DO. WE SAW IT WHEN YOU FIRED IT BLINDLY RIGHT NEXT TO OUR FACES.

I HAVE NO LASERS, AND I WILL LASER TO DEATH ANYONE WHO SAYS OTHERWISE...

UH, DIDN'T *YOU* JUST SAY OTHERWISE?

OH. AH. ER...

SO, DO YOU HAVE TO KILL YOURSELF WITH THE LASER YOU DON'T HAVE?

Um.

SOUNDS LIKE A LOGICAL PARADOX

IF YOU WERE A ROBOT, SHOULDN'T YOU SELF-DESTRUCT RIGHT NOW?

YOUR LOGIC CIRCUITS ARE FLAWED, FELLOW HUMAN.

I WILL SIMPLY USE MY HUMAN LASER TO KILL MYSELF SO I DON'T SELF-DESTRUCT.

I GUESS WE SHOULDN'T BE SURPRISED THE CIVILIZATION THAT MADE HIM CRUMBLED SOMEHOW

ONE WONDERS HOW THEY MANAGED TO LAST AS *LONG* AS THEY ACTUALLY DID.

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OKAY, WELL, THANKS FOR DROPPING BY, REALLY, BUT WE'VE **GOT** TO GET BACK TO DECIDING THE FATE OF THE WORLD THROUGH BLOOD, STEEL, AND MAGIC.

BUT WE WERE GOING TO HELP MR WARMECH FINISH HIS VENGEANCE QUEST AGAINST THE WARRIORS OF LIGHT

FINE. FINE ONCE WE'RE FINISHED WITH THEM, YOU CAN DO **WHATEVER** YOU WANT WITH THEIR CORPSES.

DEAL?

BUT YOU **ARE** A LIGHT WARRIOR

NOT FOR A LONG, LONG TIME, PAL

IT'S BEEN LIKE HALF AN HOUR!

LONG TIME

THEN WE JUST HAVE TO JACK UP THE OTHER THREE. **DAMN!**

LOATHE THOUGH I AM TO ADMIT IT, I AM **ALSO** A LIGHT WARRIOR.

AND I WILL NOT BE "JACKED UP" UPON.

FOR THE RECORD, I'M STILL A LIGHT WARRIOR AND DEFINITELY NOT A MONSTER.

OKAY. THAT'S UH, YEAH, THAT'S GOOD TO KNOW.

GOD. IF I WERE ANY MORE CANNY, I'D NEED A LABEL. **MMM!**

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NOW I'M CONFLICTED. HOW CAN WE BE EXPECTED TO METE OUT JUSTICE WHEN A PORTION OF THE GROUP TO WHOM WE ARE METE-ING NO LONGER BELONG TO THAT VERY GROUP IN QUESTION?

HARK, EVEN FURTHER COMP-LICATIONS LOOM BEFORE US.

NO!

OH, YES.

IF WE SEEK OUT THOSE WHO WERE ONCE OF THE ONE GROUP, BUT WHO ARE NOW OF THE OTHER, DO WE, BY METE-ING JUSTICE, DO WRONG BY THE NEW GROUP WHEN WE RETRIBUTE UPON THEIR CONVERT?

THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE THEN PERPETUATES ITSELF LIKE A SERIES OF EVENTS THAT ENSURE THEIR CONTINUED OCCURANCES AND OUTCOMES!

OH, IT'S VICIOUS.

WHAT TO DO, WHAT TO DO!

THERE IS ONE SIMPLE AND ELEGANT SOLUTION TO WHATEVER IT IS YOU'RE BABBLING ABOUT

YOU'RE GOING TO SAY VOTE AND I AM NOT GOING TO PARTICIPATE IN THAT.

IF YOU DON'T VOTE, YOU CAN'T COMPLAIN, MISTER

- I VOTED - LAST TIME AND I'M *VERY MUCH* COMPLAIN-ING ABOUT HOW THAT TURNED OUT!

HEY, IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT, YOU CAN GO BACK TO DUMBELFISTAN.

YOU MEAN ELF LAND? I'D LOVE TO.

GOOD

I REALLY LOST STEAM AT THE END THERE.

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OKAY, WE'VE GOT THE FINAL NUMBERS HERE.

FIVE VOTES FOR "YES"

THREE VOTES FOR "NO"

AND THIS ONE'S BLANK.

POSSIBLY BECAUSE BIKKE CAN'T READ OR WRITE.

ONE VOTE FOR "NOT A MONSTER" NOT SURE WHAT THAT MEANS.

IT MEANS WE'RE COOL. EVERYONE IS COOL.

VAR, TIS TRUE. I BE SO ILLITERATE, I DON'T BE HAVING THE CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE TO MAKE A COLORFUL METAPHOR DESCRIBIN' IT IN DETAIL.

OKAY...

ONE FOR "COOKIES."

THE AYES HAVE IT, THEN.

OH, DEAR EVER-HANDSOME ELF-GODS, ARE WE ACTUALLY STUPID ENOUGH TO HAVE VOTED ON NOTHING AT ALL?

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OKAY, SO WE KNOW WHAT WE'RE VOTING FOR THIS TIME, RIGHT?

OUR TEAM AFFILIATION!

EVERYONE WILL JUST VOTE FOR THEIR TEAM. IT'S A WASTE OF OUR TIME.

THERE'S ALSO THE RATHER UGLY MATTER OF TRUST

IT'S EITHER THIS OR I MURDER EVERYONE IN SIGHT HOW'S THAT?

WE'LL SET UP AN OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

MADE UP OF *WHOM*, EXACTLY?

OH, LORD

ONE OF THEM CAN'T READ OR COUNT, AND THE OTHER ONE'S *FIGHTER*

WHICH ONE BE YE?

YEAH, WE'RE IN GOOD HANDS.

AWRIGHT, LET'S VOTE OUR BRAINS OUT!

QUICKLY, NOW BEFORE YOU'VE GIVEN IT SIGNIFICANT THOUGHT

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I HOPE THE RESOLUTION GRANTING UNDEAD MARRIAGE IS ABLE TO PASS!

TO HELL WITH THE GOTH MARRIAGE ACT I WANT THE DE-CRIMINALIZATION OF CRIMINAL OFFENSES.

THIS IS THE LAMEST FINAL SHOWDOWN IN ALL HISTORY.

MEANWHILE

WE BE THE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE! WE CAN MAKE THEIR PRISSY LITTLE VOTES TURN OUT HOW WE WANTS THEM TO!

I DON'T FOLLOW

DON'T YE REALIZE THE POWER WHAT WE BE HOLDING IN OUR HANDS?

OH. I HEARD THEM TALKING ABOUT THAT

THEY SAID "MAKE IT FIGHTER AND BIKKE. THEY'RE TOO STUPID TO REALIZE THE POWER THEY'D HOLD."

THEY SAID THAT, DID THEY

YUP

DAMN THEIR SURVY HIDES. I THOUGHT I HAD IT ALL FIGURED OUT WHAT POWER IT BE WE WAS HOLDIN' IN OUR HANDS.

ME TOO, A LITTLE BIT BUT NO.

WHAT DOES WE DOES THEN?

COUNT UP THE VOTES I GUESS.

BE THIS GOO OR PINE-APPLE?

PINE-APPLE'S A FRUIT, BIKKE.

DON'T YE BE BRINGIN' FRUIT INTO THIS.

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THIS WAS A DUMB IDEA.

BUT, VOTING FOR TEAM MEMBERS WAS YOUR IDEA.

NO, MY IDEA WAS TO *CONFUSE* THE WARRIORS WITH AN ELECTION.

AND *THEN*... ER, HMMM.

Y'KNOW, TO BE ALL, LIKE, *MACHIAVELLIAN* Y'KNOW?

I THINK YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO CONFUSE THE ELECTORATE WITH A WAR.

WHAT?

YEAH, YOU GOT IT BACKWARDS, MAN.

WELL THAT'S JUST GREAT

NOW I'M STUCK ON *TEAM CRAPPY* HERE.

YOU'RE NOT ON OUR TEAM.

AH-HA! I MADE YOU INDIRECTLY ADMIT YOUR TEAM *IS* CRAPPY!

I'M *TOTALLY* MACHIAVELLIAN! IN YOUR *FACE*!

I'LL RUB IT IN MORE LATER. LIKE A LOT. DON'T WORRY

AND WITH NO COMEUPPANCE IN SIGHT!

LIFE IS GOOD

FOR NOW WHOSE TEAM AM I ON?

SPEAK UP

WHAT? IS IT A BIKINI TEAM?

HEY THERE, TEAMMATE!

NO.

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NOPE.

WE ARE NOT DOING THIS.

WE'RE NOT DOING THIS SO HARD IT WILL CRACK REALITY

THE HORRORS OF THE UNDERVERSE WILL POUR FROM THAT CHASM AND DEVOUR ALL THAT LIVES.

THAT'S HOW MUCH THIS IS NOT HAPPENING.

WELL, SINCE THAT'S NOT HAPPENING, THIS MUST ***BE HAPPENING*** THEN!

EXACTLY. WAIT, WHAT? NO! HOW'D YOU MAKE THAT MAKE ***ANY*** SENSE?

TEAM SUPERBUDDIES IS GO!

WHERE'S THE GODDAMN UNDERVERSE WHEN YOU NEED IT?! ***ARGH!***

AH! I'VE GOT IT!

THERE'S ONLY TWO OF US.

IT'S NOT A REAL TEAM UNLESS THERE'S FOUR OF US, SO LOOKS LIKE WE ***HAVE*** TO DISBAND ISN'T THAT TOO BAD

ALREADY TOOK CARE OF THAT WE'RE ***SUCH*** SUPERBUDDIES THAT WE EACH COUNT TWICE.

ISN'T THAT JUST SUPER!

GET IT? ***SUPER!***

AS IN THE KIND OF [redacted] ARE!

OH, I GET IT SO HELP ME LORDS OF HATE, I GET IT TO THE ***MAX.***

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OKAY, HOLD IT. WE CAN'T BE A TEAM.

CA...ED THE SUPERBUDDIES.

..RIGHT

WE CAN'T BE...*THAT* BECAUSE THAT'D LEAVE UNEVEN NUMBERS IN SOME OF THE OTHER TEAMS, PRO QU.D FACTO IPSO, GOTTA DISBAND

ALREADY THOUGHT OF THAT, SUPER-BUDDY!

SEE, PEOPLE VARIOUSLY VOTED FOR ONE OR MORE OF THE FOL..OWING:

WHICH TEAM THEY WANTED TO BE ON, WHO THEY WANTED ON THEIR TEAMS, OR WHO THEY DID **NOT** WANT ON THEIR TEAMS.

AND SINCE THAT STUFF DIDN'T ADD UP, ESPECIA..Y WITH B.KKE'S HE.P, WE HAD TO SORTA INTERPRET THE RESULTS.

THERE ***WAS*** A CERTAIN LACK OF STRUCTURE DUE TO THE RUSHED NATURE OF THE THING.

THUS I SUFFER THROUGH NO FAULT OF MY OWN.

MINUTES AGO

AWRIGHT. LET'S VOTE OUR BRAINS OUT!

QUICKLY, NOW. BEFORE YOU'VE GIVEN IT SIGNIFICANT THOUGHT

BUT YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE TOO DUMB TO ABUSE YOUR POWER!

IT'S NOT AN ABUSE IT'S IN THE CHARTER

WHAT CHARTER!

ONCE WE REA..IZED THE OVER-SIGHT COMMITTEE DIDN'T HAVE ANY OF THE POWER WE WEREN'T SMART ENOUGH TO FIGURE OUT, WE HAD TO WRITE UP A CHARTER TO GRANT THE COMMITTEE CERTA.N RIGHTS TO CARRY OUT ITS DUTIES.

ANYWAY, ADJUSTMENTS WERE MADE TO BALANCE THE TEAMS.

"ADJUSTMENTS."

YEAH. I'M ON ALL TEAMS!

THAT'S GREAT HOW I CAN'T ESCAPE YOU.

JUST GREAT!

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THE NEW TEAM ROSTERS GO: THE SUPER-BUDDIES.

THAT'S US.

I KNOW

THE UNIVERSE OBEYS ARBITRARY LAWS PARTY

PHYSICS IS FAR FROM ARBITRARY

JUST LIKE SPELL SLOTS.

THE ETHNIC SIRS.

GET IT!

THE WILDCATS.

THAT WAS MY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL MASCOT WILDCATS!

AND THE FIGHTING FIGHTERS.

ALSO BIKKE

HOW'D YOU DO THAT?

I ..DON'T KNOW..

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WHAT WAS THIS SUPPOSED TO ACCOMPLISH?

WE HAD THREE TEAMS WITH A LITTLE CONFUSION OVER WHO GOT TO KILL WHO.

NOW? WE'VE GOT FIVE.

SIX WITH THE AUXILIARY LEAGUE OF FIGHTERS.

WHOM I HAVE ON CONTRACT

THE CONTRACT IS FOR SALE AT A DEBILITATING COST

I'LL GO INTO DEBT TO PURCHASE THAT CONTRACT!

SOLD I AM NOW SELLING THE DEBT

HOLD IT! YOU CAN'T DO THIS.

YOU COMPLAIN ABOUT THE SITUATION IN ONE BREATH AND PROFIT FROM IT WITH THE NEXT

HEY, I'D BE AS DUMB AS THE REST OF YOU IF I DIDN'T TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE REST OF YOU FOR BEING SO DUMB.

DAMMIT

I SAY, HAVE AT THEE!

WE'RE ON THE SAME TEAM.

ARE WE? BLAST IT ALL.

AND BY THE TIME HE FINDS OUT I'M NOT, I'LL HAVE ALREADY BOUGHT OUT HIS RIGHTS TO HURT ME. HA!

I SHOULD PROBABLY THANK YOU FOR MAKING IT EVEN EASIER FOR ME TO SCREW YOU GUYS OVER AND WALK AWAY UNHARMED

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WHAT WE HAVE HERE IS A BREAKDOWN OF ALLEGIANCE

WE NEED A ROSTER

OR MAYBE NAMETAGS.

NOPE TOO MUCH WORK.

BUT IT'D ONLY TAKE A MINUTE

NO, I MEANT TO *READ*

THAT'S JUST ***TWO MORE*** SECONDS BETWEEN STABBING AND MY VICTIM.

NOW SEE HERE, I--

SEE? I'D HAVE HAD TO HEAR A ***FULL*** SENTENCE JUST THEN.

LET'S BE REASONABLE HERE

OKAY, IT'S NOT FOOLPROOF AGAINST SHORTER SENTENCES.

OR FRAGMENTS!

YES. FRAGMENTS TOO.

I'M ALL OUT OF KNIFE ANYWAY.

ARE WE READY TO MOVE FORWARDS LIKE ADULTS?

I LIED.

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WELL, THREE DOWN, SO MANY MORE TO GO.

HI, VILBERT!

FIGHTER ARE YOU, DUMB *AND* UGLY?

I'M NOT VILBERT.

HE'S BEHIND YOU.

OF *COURSE* HE'S

WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?

I'M A VAMPIRE I'M AFRAID A KNIFE'S NOT GOING TO *CUT IT* PARDON THE PUN.

...THEN WHY'D YOU LOOK DEAD EARLIER?

FOR THE SCENE IT WAS A GREAT RP

WAIT I'VE *SEEN* YOU IN THE SUN IF YOU *ARE* A VAMPIRE, WHY—

IF MY CHARACTER *DIES*, IT SHOULD BE MORE INTERESTING THAN *THAT*

FINE, WHATEVER

AT LEAST *BARLAND* IS DEAD

SORRY, IT'S A GREAT BIG ARMORED HELM.

COME *ON*! YOU WERE DEAD!

...I DIDN'T WANT TO APPEAR RUDE, SO I FAKED IT TOO.

FFFF...! WHAT ABOUT RANGER?

IS HE DEAD OR TAKING A NAP?

NOPE, HE'S DEAD

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HA! EAT IT! I KILLED A GUY!

NOW FOR THE CEREMONIAL DANCE ATOP HIS CORPSE!

THIS ENSURES THAT HIS BODY DOES NOT RISE AS THE WALKING DEAD

THE DANCE IS PURELY FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOCIETY, AND I TAKE NO PLEASURE IN PERFORMING IT

OKAY THEN

AS I WAS SAYING:

HE'S DEAD ***GOOD THING I'M A HEALER AND HIS FRIEND.***

WHAAAT!? THAT'S CHEATING. THAT'S HARDCORE CHEATING.

HOW IS IT CHEATING EXACTLY?

HE'S NOT ON YOUR TEAM!

IS HE?

AH-HA! EXACTLY AS I HOPED FOR THE SAKE OF MY POINT!

HE ISN'T!

SO?

SO?! SO, YOU ***CAN'T*** HELP PEOPLE WHO ***AREN'T*** ON YOUR TEAM!

THAT'S A DOUBLE NEGATIVE.

I THINK THAT MEANS I HAVE TO HELP THEM.

THIS IS ANARCHY!

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ONE ROUND OF HEALING LATER AND...

I CALL FOR DISMANTLING OUR CRUDE SYSTEM OF SELF-GOVERNANCE FOR A RETURN TO THE HEADY DAYS OF A FREE-FOR-ALL.

LET ME MAKE SURE I GET THIS.

YOU CLAIM THAT WE ARE NOW IN A STATE OF ANARCHY BECAUSE A MINORITY DOES NOT FOLLOW THE RULES PRECISELY AS YOU PREFER

YOUR SOLUTION IS TO ABOLISH ALL PRETENSE OF ORDER IN FAVOR OF TEARING EACH OTHER APART LIKE RABID ANIMALS.

NO, NO, NO. RABID ANIMALS RARELY USE MAGIC AND ALMOST NEVER USE WEAPONS.

ALL THIS TEAM NONSENSE WAS YOUR IDEA, Y'KNOW

I RECANT IT IS TOTALLY RECANTED.

THAT...NO. YOU CAN'T DO THAT

ON THE OTHER HAND, I HATE MY CURRENT TEAM SLIGHTLY MORE THAN MY OLD TEAM. HERE'S THE PLAN.

SLOW DOWN THERE, ACE

I THINK *I'M* THE POLITICAL MASTERMIND 'ROUND HERE.

YOU ENGINEERED AN ELECTION SHAM WITH NO UNDERSTANDING OR CONTROL AND THUS GOT STUCK WITH THE WORST POSSIBLE OUTCOME FOR YOU.

BUT I WON IN THE SHORT TERM, THIEF

WHY DO I AIM FOR THE SHORT TERM? BECAUSE THAT'S THE ***NOW*** AND IT IS ***ALWAYS*** NOW. SEE?

THEREFORE: THERE IS NO LONG TERM, SO IT CAN'T SCREW ME.

WHAT'S UP, SUPERBUDDY!

SO, YEAH. THE PLAN.

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WHAT IN THE HELL IS HE DOING?

SHHHH! YOU'LL BREAK HIS CONCEN-TRATION!

SORRY!

SORRY

WHAT AM I..

HE'S FIGHTER **BLINKING** BREAKS HIS CONCENTRATION.

C'MON, HE'S GOTTEN BETTER ABOUT THAT

IT MAKES HIM THINK HE'S **ASLEEP!**

IT'S LIKE PUTTING A SHEET OVER A BIRDCAGE, REALLY

HEY, YOU WANTED A FREE-FOR-ALL.

WELL, YOU'RE LOOKING AT IT

THAT

THAT

THAT'S A FREE-FOR-ALL?

THAT'S WHAT I SAID IT WAS.

THIS IS ONE OF THOSE CULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS, ISN'T IT.

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NO, YOUR FREE-FOR-ALL IDEA WAS DUMB

FOR THE RECORD, ALL YOUR IDEAS? DUMB

YOU'RE THE DUMB IDEA!

THAT SOUNDED WAY BETTER IN MY HEAD...

LOOK, THE OTHER WARRIORS DON'T HATE EACH OTHER

IMPOSSIBLE. THEY'RE ALL TOO NICE

I DON'T CLAIM TO UNDERSTAND IT, I'M JUST TELLING YOU HOW IT IS.

IF IT CAME TO A FREE-FOR-ALL, THEY'D BACK EACH OTHER UP AND WHERE'D THAT LEAVE US?

GETTING OUR HEADS CAVED IN WHILE WE PRETEND TO TEAM UP WITH OUR FRIENDS TO BACK-STAB THEM.

OH, THEY'RE SOOOOD.

SO, THIS IS HOW WE'RE DOING IT

A CHAMPION WAS CHOSEN AT "RANDOM" FROM EACH TEAM.

THUS, FIGHTER

IN DOUBLE ELIMINATION DEATH MATCHES. HOW DOES THAT WORK?

I DON'T KNOW, NOT MY PROBLEM.

SHH!

I'M WAITING FOR THE PERFECT MOMENT TO LAUNCH A BRUTAL FIRST STRIKE TO CATCH MYSELF UNAWARES.

ALTERNATIVELY, I'M WAITING FOR ME TO MAKE THE FIRST MOVE SO I CAN COUNTER MY OWN MOMENTUM.

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WATCHING HIM NOT BUDGE AN INCH IS ODDLY HYPNOTIC.

SURE. WHY NOT LOOK, WE'VE GOT TO DO ***SOMETHING*** ABOUT THIS MESS.

TEAM AFFILIATIONS ARE COMPLETELY CONFUSED

THE DEATHMATCH BETWEEN FIGHTER, FIGHTER, FIGHTER, AND FIGHTER IS DISTRACTION ENOUGH TO KEEP THINGS UNDER CONTROL

FOR NOW

THAT'S THE WHOLE POINT OF GLADIATORIAL EVENTS.

BUT IT'S A TEMPORARY MEASURE.

WHAT WE NEED IS A MORE PERMANENT SOLUTION.

I MEAN, IF I LEARNED ***ANYTHING*** FROM BEING ROYALTY, IT'S THAT YOU CAN ONLY PROPERLY OPPRESS PEOPLE THROUGH A STABILITY BORDERING ON STAGNATION.

BUT YOU HAD TO JUMBLE IT UP. WHICH I SUPPOSE MAKE SENSE GIVEN YOUR FRANKLY UNSTABLE NATURE.

THOUGH I'M STILL AT A LOSS AS TO WHAT YOU EXPECTED TO GAIN.

I'M SORRY WERE YOU SAYING SOMETHING?

I CAN'T STOP WATCHING ***WHATEVER*** IT IS THIS IS.

OH, NOTHING ***IMPORTANT***

THOUGH IN THE FUTURE I MAY REFER TO THE BLANK CHECK YOU GRANTED ME DURING THIS CONVERSATION VIS A VIS YOUR RIGHTS.

DRIZZ'L! WE SHOULD TALK.

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AND THAT'S MY PLAN.

INTERESTING.

I'M A BIT SURPRISED THAT YOU'D COME TO ME WITH IT.

I FELT ONLY A FELLOW ELF COULD FULLY APPRECIATE ITS BEAUTY

AND I DO. BUT WHAT I FIND MOST SURPRISING IS THAT YOU'D THINK I COULD EVER HELP ONE OF MY FATHER'S MURDERERS!

WHY SHOULDN'T I TIP OFF THE OTHER LIGHT WARRIORS NOW?

OR RALLY THE DARK WARRIORS AGAINST YOU?

WELL, **TECHNICALLY** I MERELY STOOD IDLY BY WHILE MY FRIENDS KILLED H.M.

AND THEN TOOK CREDIT FOR THE KILL WHENEVER IT WAS POLITICALLY CONVENIENT

DAMN.

THAT'S PRACTICALLY DEFENDING HIM UNDER ELF LAW.

LIKE IT SAYS IN OUR NATIONAL ANTHEM: ***ELFLAND, AND FUCK YOU TOO***. "WE ARE A RACE OF TOTAL BASTARDS."

YOU STOLE THAT ANTHEM FROM US WHEN YOU STOLE THE KINGDOM Y'KNOW.

YES, I BELIEVE THERE'S A LINE IN THE SONG ABOUT THAT. IT GOES:

"WE ARE A RACE OF TOTAL BASTARDS."

I WALKED INTO THAT.

OH, NO. YOU RAN.

LIKE YOUR HOUSE WAS SET ON FIRE.

DARK ELF PALACE? IT WAS.

YOU FOUND ME LIVING IN A CAVE.

AWKWARD.

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LEFT HAND MAN GARY!

TELL ME WHAT NEWS YOU MAY FROM MY VAST AND INVINCIBLE KINGDOM!

IT'S FUNNY YOU SHOULD PUT IT THAT WAY, MY KING.

YOUR TWO SENSELESS WARS--

TUT TUT, TUT

YOUR "DOUBLE PRE-EMPTIVE SUPER KICK ASS WAR", SIRE.

THAT'S BETTER

TO CHARACTERIZE IT AS A SPECTACULAR FAILURE DOESN'T BEGIN TO CHARACTERIZE IT

MHMM.

SO, IT'S A TREMENDOUS SUCCESS.

NO, SIRE NOT EVEN CLOSE.

I SEE. THEN WE'RE ALREADY VICTORIOUS?

MOVING ON...

WE COULD ACTUALLY WHEATHER THIS DISASTROUS MILITARY CAMPAIGN WERE WE NOT EXPERIENCING PEAK MANA.

THAT'S EASY

DRILL FOR MORE MANA.

SIR, THE EXORBITANT ENERGY COST OF DOING SO COUPLED WITH THE FACT THAT YOU CAN'T GET MANA THAT WAY IS IN NO SMALL PART THE PROBLEM'S PRIMARY CONTRIBUTOR.

AND THE MORE REASON TO DRILL UNTIL IT DOES WORK

MEANWHILE

ONE MIGHT THINK WAGING A FOUR-WAY DOUBLE-ELIMINATION DUEL TO THE DEATH WITH YOURSELF COULD DRIVE YOU INSANE.

BUT REALLY? IT MAKES YOU SUPER SANE

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WHAT IS THIS SUPPOSED TO BE?

HMM? ISN'T IT OBVIOUS?

HUMOR ME.

I'M FOLLOWING FIGHTER'S PATH TOWARD INNER PEACE

FIGHTER WOULDN'T KNOW INNER PEACE IF IT ERUPTED OUT OF HIS CHEST AND RIPPED HIS GROIN OUT WITH ITS ICHOR-CAKED CLAWS.

CAN WE NOT TALK ABOUT *EXACTLY* THOSE THINGS?

WHY? DOES IT TARNISH THE SHINY HAPPINESS YOU HAVE ON THE INSIDE?

SPLURK.

I MEAN YES!

HEY GUYS. YOU CHECK OUT FIGHTER?

I'M THE VICTIM HERE!

DON'T BLAME ME!

THIS COULD HAVE HAPPENED TO ANY OF YOU!

IS IT JUST ME, OR IS IT KINDA HYPNOTIC?

I WAS SAYING THE SAME THING TO THIEF EARLIER

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MY SOURCES HAVE *INFORMED* ME OF ANOTHER QUEST.

I HAVE OFT WONDER'D THE NATURE OF YOUR SOURCES, ROGUE.

I KNOW A GUY..

AS YOU SAY, BUT-

GOOD FRIEND RANGER, *MAYHAP* WE ARE BETTER FOR NOT KNOWING.

THAT'S A FINE POINT. ROGUE'S CONTACTS WOULD NO DOUBT PREFER THEIR ANONYMITY

PLEASE, DO GO ON.

THERE'S THIS KIDNAPPING.

I SHOULD HOPE SO. LITTLE CHILDREN NEED THEIR REST

AYE

LET'S... Y'KNOW, LET'S START OVER. I MISSPOKE

VERY WELL.

THERE *WAS* A KIDNAPPING.

WHAT WOKE HIM UP?

OR HER. LET US NOT ASSUME

AREN'T WE ABOVE THIS KIND OF QUEST?

THIS SHOULD BE EASIER.

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6 HOURS LATER...

A CHILD WAS ILLEGALLY TAKEN WITHOUT THE PERMISSION OF HIS PARENT OR GUARDIAN.

I SAY, GASP!

WHY, THIS KIND OF THING IS RIGHT UP OUR ALLEY!

GREAT! REALLY SHOULDN'T HAVE TAKEN SO LONG TO EXPLAIN OR TO SINK IN.

BUT THAT'S FINE. REALLY, IT'S FINE

OKAY, SO THIS KIDNAPPED ORPHAN NEEDS HELP AND--

ORPHANS DON'T HAVE PARENTS.

OR GUARDIANS.

THEY'RE UNWANTED AND UNLOVED

HEH.

THE BLACK MAGE OF KIDS.

SORRY.

AS YOU MAY HAVE OVER-HEARD, OUR HEROICS ARE NEEDED ELSE-WHERE

YES, I'M SURE IT'S VERY SERIOUS AND YOU HAVE TO GO NOW.

LIKE, *RIGHT NOW*

ONWARD, O BRAVE WARRIORS OF VIRTUE!

THAT *IS* WHAT EVERYONE CALLS ORPHANS, BY THE WAY

I KNOW..

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WITH THOSE OTHER WARRIORS *GONE*, IT'S JUST DOWN TO US.

THEN IT IS TIME.

YES. TIME FOR SLEEP

WE WILL *RESUME* OUR NEVERENDING BATTLE IN THE MORNING.

FIGHTER, YOU COM.N'? IT'S SLEEPY TIME.

CAN'T MUST BE *EVER-VIGILANT* AGAINST MY IMAGIN-ARY ENEMIES.

WHAT IF YOU'RE THE IMAGINARY ONE?

IF I WAS, THEN THAT'D MEAN...

EVERYONE I EVER KNEW...

OR CARED ABOUT..

EVERYTHING THERE EVER WAS, WAS A *LIE*

THAT DREAM WAS LIKE *80%* FILLER

THE END!

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THAT'S WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE IF THIS WASN'T REALITY

SO, IN THE "REAL" AND HORRIBLE THREE DIMENSIONAL UNIVERSE WHERE THIS ONE IS ONLY A DREAM, YOU'RE A WOMAN I GUESS?

YEAH, I'M NOT SURE *WHERE* I WAS GOING WITH THAT ONE.

WAIT A SECOND

WHAT DO THOSE...

GET OUT OF..

HEY!

COULDN'T HELP BUT NOTICE EVERYONE'S IN *MY* ROOM FOR SOME REASON.

MIGHT BE BECAUSE OUR ROOMS ARE MADE OUT OF LAVA AND SPIKES.

THERE IS NOWHERE ELSE TO SLEEP

I FAIL TO SEE HOW THAT'S *MY* PROBLEM. OR FAULT IN ANY WAY

HOW?

OH, BY CHOICE.

THE REAL QUESTION HERE IS HOW TO GUARANTEE THAT NO ONE TRIES TO KILL EVERYONE IN THE NIGHT.

THAT'S SIMPLE ENOUGH. THE *FIGHTERS* WILL KEEP WATCH.

WHAT IF HE TRIES SOME-THING?

HE WON'T.

THE OTHER FIGHTERS ARE *WATCHING* HIM.

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JUST GONNA KEEP WATCH.

GONNA MAKE SURE MY FRIENDS AREN'T KILLED

GONNA WATCH MY HYPOTHETICAL DOPPLEGANGERS LIKE A HAWK FOR THE SLIGHTEST WEAKNESS.

Aaaaaa NIGHT

NOT GONNA GO CRAZY FROM THE ***HOURS AND HOURS*** OF RELENTLESS STRESS AND EXHAUSTION.

OR FROM PLANNING SIX HUNDRED MOVES AHEAD IN EACH OF FOUR SIMULTANEOUS DEATHMATCHES AGAINST MYSELF

FROM BOTH SIDES.

WHO SAID THAT?

AH!

YOU'RE GETTING SLOPPY. I HAD MY BACK TURNED

YUP

I'M NOT GOING TO GO CRAZY AND KILL EVERYONE.

IN FACT...

IF THERE'S NO ONE LEFT TO KILL, THEN WE DON'T HAVE TO PROTECT THEM AND WE WON'T GO CRAZY!

WE'RE DOING THIS FOR THEIR OWN SAFETY

EXCELLENT POINT YES, I THOUGHT SO AS WELL.

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I'M JUST GONNA WALK IN THERE.

AND THEN SLAUGHTER EVERYONE IN AN ACT OF PERFECT SANITY

THAT WAY I WON'T HAVE TO GO CRAZY TRYING TO GUARD THEM ALL NIGHT!

IT'S THE PERFECT PLAN!

FIGHTER

HEY, DOC! ARE YOU HERE TO HELP ME?

YES, FIGHTER

GREAT IT'LL GO FASTER THIS WAY

SO, YOU TAKE THE ONES ON THE LEFT AND I'LL TAKE THE ONES ON THE LEFT

NO, FIGHTER

OKAY. YOU CAN TAKE THE ONES ON THE LEFT THEN.

WELL, **NO**, THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT

FIGHTER, LISTEN VERY CLOSELY

YOU ARE THE ENLIGHTENED WARRIOR, BUT YOU'RE ALSO VERY, **VERY** STUPID

I DON'T FOLLOW

YEAH, SEE, THAT'S RATHER THE PROBLEM, ACTUALLY

WHAT'S A PROBLEM?

LET'S TAKE THIS SLOW

WHOAH, WHOAH! LET'S SLOW DOWN, CHIEF

YOU'RE SLOWING DOWN **WAY** TOO FAST THERE.

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YOU CAN'T KILL THEM. EACH HAS A ROLE IN WHAT IS TO COME NEXT

WHY SHOULD I LISTEN TO YOU?

YOU'RE JUST A PIGMENT OF MY IMAGINATION. LIKE BLEEN OR GURPLE.

THAT'S... WOW. I'M...UH GOING TO POWER THROUGH THAT ONE.

YOUR FRIENDS AND, YES, YOUR ENEMIES ARE ***INTEGRAL*** TO THE FUTURE.

REALLY?

THAT'S WHAT I HEARD

FROM WHO?

SIR KNIFINGTON, C.P.A.

HE READ IT ON THE BULLETIN BOARD

A ***KNIGHTED*** ACCOUNTANT?

BULLETIN BOARDS?

THAT'S A HECK OF A SOCIETY I DIDN'T KNOW YOU GUYS HAD

OH, WE'VE GOT IT ALL...

PLUMBERS, CELEBRITIES, ***ALL*** KINDS OF STUFF, REALLY

I KIND OF THOUGHT YOU WERE THE HEAVENLY AVATAR OF SWORDS.

ON MY DAYS OFF, YEAH.

DAYS OFF?

YOU CAN'T AVATAR FULL TIME THERE'S JUST NO MONEY IN IT

EXCEPT FOR OL' DOLLARSLY THAT GUYS' ROLLING IN IT

WE'RE AGREED THEN I HAVE TO KILL THEM ALL TO KEEP MY SAN.TY

THAT'S THE EXACT OPPOSITE OF MY POSITION

MHMM. I SEE.

WHAT IF I ONLY KILL THEM A LITTLE?

FIGHTER THAT'S NOT POSSIBLE.

MHMM. I SEE.

WHAT IF I JUST RUN IN THERE AND KILL THEM ALL ANYWAY?

I WON'T LET YOU DO THAT

MHMM. I SEE.

WHAT IF I ***OVERPOWER*** YOU WITH MY SUPERIOR NUMBERS?

THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE.

NO?

WELL, OKAY, WHAT IF WE DO THIS INSTEAD?

I WAS RIGHT

THAT DIDN'T MAKE SENSE

MEANWHILE

GASP! THEY'RE INVISIBLE NOW!

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NO, WAIT.

THEY'RE NOT INVISIBLE, THAT VIOLATES OAKRAM'S LASER.

ALL OTHER THINGS BEING EQUAL THE SIMPLEST SOLUTION IS ALE

AND YOU CARVED THAT WITH A LASER?

SURE, I GUESS? DUNNO, M'DRUNK!

I NEVER LIKED YOU

I BET THEY SHRUNK, 'CAUSE THAT *RHYRMES* WITH DRUNK

ELSEWHERE IN THE TEMPLE OF FIENDS...

THERE'S ONLY ONE SAFE SOLUTION TO MY TRANSFORMATION PROBLEM.

IT'S SPELLED DATASPHERE!

AND YET ELSEWHERE...

SO, IS THE WORLD A SMOKING RUIN YET?

I'M WORKING ON IT.

THERE'S MORE TO THE APOCALYPSE THAN RUNNING AROUND LIKE A MANIAC, Y'KNOW

NO, THERE REALLY ISN'T

YOU ARE A WALKING MAGICAL NEXUS OF DESTRUCTIVE FORCE.

BEING A MANIAC IS ALL IT TAKES.

ARGH!

JUST ONCE, I'D LIKE TO SEE A THING LIKE THAT AND KNOW IT *DIDN'T* INVOLVE SOMEONE I KNOW

OR BETTER YET, I'D RATHER LEAD A LIFE WHERE I DON'T SEE THESE THINGS AT ALL.

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ELSEWHERE...

TIME TO COLLECT

THAT'S FUNNY ELVES SAY THAT JUST BEFORE THEY KILL SOMEONE TO TAKE ALL THEIR MONEY

WAIT THAT'S ONLY FUNNY WHEN I'M SAYING IT.

HMM, NO. IT'S PRETTY FUNNY THIS WAY TOO.

ELSEWHERE S'MORE...

OKAY, EVERYONE GOT ENOUGH SNACKS, RIGHT?

GREAT LORD OF SPIDERS, CAN'T WE HAVE ONE MEETING WITHOUT SMOKE?

ONLY IF YE WANT TO BE STRUNGED UP THE MITTEN-MAST BY YE THUMBS.

UH, YOU HAVE NO IDEA THAT YOU MEANT MIZZEN-MAST, DO YOU.

YE DON'T KNOW THAT FOR SURE

C'MON, GUYS.

I JUST WANT AN ANSWER.

THE MITTEN-MAST BE JUST LIKE THAT THERE MISSIN' MAST

WHAT?

YOU MEAN MIZZEN-MAST, RIGHT?

AYE, THAT TOO.

AND THIS IS WHY HISTORY WILL EXONERATE ME FOR STABBING YOU GUYS IN THE BACK.

WOULD EXONERATE ME.

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WHAT IS IT ***EXACTLY*** THAT YOU INTEND TO COLLECT?

PAYMENT FOR SERVICES RENDERED

HMM, ARE THESE ACTUAL OR FICTIONAL SERVICES?

I INVENTED CHICANERY

YOU DON'T WANT TO PLAY THIS GAME WITH ME, ELF IT WILL BE THE END OF YOU.

A DRAGON NEARLY TOLD ME THE ***EXACT SAME*** THING ONCE

BUT SHE'S DEAD NOW.

REALLY TRYING TO TRICK THE TRICKSTER GOD THAT SEEMS LIKE A GOOD IDEA TO YOU?

HEY, HE'D NEVER SEE IT COMING

YES, I WOULD

AH, BUT MAYBE IN ***BEING*** PREPARED, YOU WEREN'T PREPARED ***ENOUGH*** TO BE PROPERLY PREPARED

SORRY, YOU LOST ME AT THE PART WHERE YOU WERE BEING VERY STUPID

IT WAS A SLIP OF THE TONGUE,

OBVIOUSLY, I DIDN'T ENTER INTO A GRAND SCHEME WITH FELLOW CONIVING ELF THIEF TO SLAUGHTER ***YOU*** GUYS WHILE ***HE*** KILLS HIS OWN HATED COMRADES OBVIOUSLY.

YE SAID "OBVIOUSLY" ONCE'T ALREADY

THAT'S HOW OBVIOUS IT IS.

IT'S DOUBLE OBVIOUS.

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I GUESS WHAT ***CONFUSES*** ME IS, I'M NOT SURE WHY YOU THINK I OWE YOU ANYTHING.

LET ME SPEAK PLAINLY THEN

THERE WAS A TIME I BROUGHT YOU BACK FROM DEATH.

IN RETURN, YOU PROMISED TO GIVE ME WHATEVER I ASKED AT A LATER, AND UNSPECIFIED DATE.

TURNS OUT THAT'S NOW.

BUT SEE, THAT JUST BRINGS UP A NEW THORNY ISSUE.

DO TELL.

WELL, I COULD SAY THAT THE ALLEGED AGREEMENT WAS MADE UNDER DURESS AND THEREFORE INVALID

OF COURSE. THE ONLY WAY ANYONE AGREES ON ANYTHING IN ELFLAND IS FOR ONE PARTY TO BE UNDER DURESS.

OTHER-WISE, EVERYONE JUST HAGGLES AND NOTHING GETS DONE.

SO, I'LL HAVE TO OBJECT ON THE GROUNDS THAT YOU TRICKED ME INTO THINKING I WAS DEAD WHEN I WASN'T

YOU DIDN'T BRING ME "BACK" FROM ANYTHING AT ALL.

THEREFORE, I DON'T OWE YOU JACK.

HOW DID YOU FIND OUT?

I ONLY SUSPECTED IT UNTIL YOU YOU CONFIRMED IT FOR ME JUST NOW.

OOPS.

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MEANWHILE, WHERE RED MAGE IS...

WHAT'D YOU DO THIS TIME?

FIRST, I ADMIT *NO-THING!*

OKAY. SECOND, IT'S ***POSSIBLE*** THAT, DUE TO EVENTS THAT ***WEREN'T*** MY FAULT IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT, I ***MIGHT*** HAVE CONTRACTED A ***SLIGHT*** CASE OF SEVERE [illegible].

AND TO FIX THAT, I ***MIGHT***'VE LOOKED INTO THE DATASPHERE.

YOU WHAT

MORE OF A ***PEEK*** ON A SCALE OF ONE-TO-STALKING, THIS WAS A TWO, TWO AND A HALF

LIKE A GLANCE THAT'S A SPLIT SECOND TOO LONG AND TURNS CREEPY

NOT A FULL ON LOOK

YOU THOUGHT IT WAS A GOOD IDEA TO LOOK INTO A DEVICE THAT ***WILL DRIVE YOU INSANE*** BY LOOKING ***INTO IT.***

IT WAS A BETTER IDEA THAN WAITING TO TURN INTO A MONSTER AND BEING MURDERED BY MY FRIENDS!

ANYWAY, I'M NOT INSANE

OH YEAH? THEN WHY DOES THE BACKGROUND KEEP CHANGING, SMART GUY?

AH-HA! THAT PROVES THAT YOU'RE A HALLUCINATION, BECAUSE IF YOU WEREN'T A PRODUCT OF MY MIND, YOU WOULDN'T KNOW ABOUT THAT!

WHAT IF THIS ITERATION OF ME IS THE ILLUSION, BUT THE REAL ME IS STILL REAL?

THIS IS CONFUSING.

MAYBE THERE'S A SOLUTION IN THE DATA-SPHERE

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WILL YOU STOP LOOKING INTO THE ANCIENT ***INSANITY BOX*** ALREADY!

I DON'T HAVE TO LISTEN TO YOU.

YOU'RE JUST THE ILLUSION OF A PHANTOM OF A HALLUCINATION I HAD

GREAT, THIS BRICK WALL OF WORDS AGAIN. LOOK, CAN I JUST DELIVER MY VAGUE PORTENTS AND LEAVE?

DO AS YOU LIKE. I'LL BE OVER HERE ***DISBELIEVING*** IN YOU.

BECAUSE I'M SANE.

AND I KNOW I AM BECAUSE I'M CONSTANTLY THINKING "DON'T BE CRAZY" TO MYSELF

CRAZY PEOPLE DON'T ***DO*** THAT BECAUSE CRAZY PEOPLE DON'T ***WORRY*** ABOUT BECOMING CRAZY

SEE? THAT'S WHY I'M NOT WORRIED ABOUT ***BEING*** CRAZY, BECAUSE I AM.

CRAZY?

NO, WORRIED!

YOU ARE THE WORST PERSON ***IN THE WORLD*** TO AVATAR FOR, YOU KNOW

NO, BUT I'M HALLUCINATING THAT I AM.

THAT'S IT I DON'T NEED THIS. I'M OUTTA HERE.

IT WAS A PLEASURE NOT SPEAKING WITH YOU!

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WHAT HAPPENED HERE?

IF I MAY

CLEARLY, RED MAGE, DRUNK WITH STUPIDITY, TOOK IT UPON HIMSELF TO SLAY THIS HIDEOUS CREATURE.

HE FAILED MISERABLY, OF COURSE

FAILURE IS PRETTY MUCH HIS JOB

AND HE FAILED ***SO HARD*** IT LEFT RED MAGE CATATONIC.

THE MONSTER WAS SO ***EMBARASSED*** BY RED MAGE'S PITIFUL (AND TYPICAL) INCOMPETENCE THAT IT COMMIT EXPLOSIVE SUICIDE

THEN THIS DATASPHERE APPEARED FOR NO REASON.

I'M NOT SURE ***ANY*** OF THAT IS VERY LIKELY, AND I ***KNOW*** PARTS OF IT ARE IMPOSS-IBLE.

WELL, OKAY, LOOK, IT WAS EITHER THAT OR RED MAGE WAS SECRETLY TURNED INTO A MONSTER AND THOUGHT HE COULD CURE HIM-SELF BY ACCESSING THE INFINITE DESTRUCTIVE WISDOM OF THE DATASPHERE HE POCKETED FROM WARMECH.

BUT I DOUBT THAT WAS IT

OH?

YEAH, THIS ONE'S EMPTY

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FIGHTER, WHAT ARE YOU--

SHHHH! THEY'RE INVISIBLE

WAIT, WHAT?

QUIET, THEY'LL SEE YOU!

I'M JUST GOING TO THROW THIS OUT THERE AND SEE IF IT STICKS. MAYBE THEY WALKED OUT HMMM?

THAT MAKES NO SENSE.

WHAT IF I TOLD YOU THAT I SAW THEM WALK AWAY?

HOW?

UH, WITH MY *INVISIBLE* GLASSES.

SEE, NOW THAT'S HOW LOGIC WORKS.

EMPTY? IT CONTAINED ALL THE PLANS FOR EVERY WAY TO DESTROY EVERY-THING THAT WILL EVER EXIST

IT CAN'T BE EMPTY

NOT YET.

YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO LOOK INTO IT!

OH, I DID THAT AGES AGO.

AND?!

I COULD SEE THE WAY GODS DO.

BUT THEN THIS JERK MADE ME THINK ABOUT BOOBIES.

THE REST IS A SOFT, WARM, INVITING BLUR

H'OKAY, LET'S MOVE ON. QUICKLY

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I'M NOT FULLY **CONVINCED** THIS IS SUCH A HOT IDEA.

WE ARE HEROES AND THIS IS WHERE WE ARE NEEDED!

THERE IS NO HOTTER IDEA!

AYE, AS WARRIORS BRAVE AND TRUE, WE MUST COME TO THE AID OF THOSE WHO NEED IT

SURE, I'M DOWN FOR ALL THAT JAZZ.

BUT **THIS** SEEMS EXCESSIVELY DANGEROUS.

YOUR YAMMERING WOULD BORE ME TO TEARS EVEN IF I WASN'T PRE-BORED OF IT FROM THE FUTURE

KNAVE! YOU MUST RELINQUISH THE INNOCENT CHILD OR FACE OUR **HEROIC** THRASHINGS.

HMM, NO. THE KID STAYS WITH ME.

DO NOT PROFESS THAT WE FAILED TO GIVE AMPLE FORE-WARNING!

WE SHOULD RUN NOW.

CRAP

SPIT

KILL!

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FASHAWK

UM.

YES, THAT IS THE CORRECT RESPONSE

OH, HE'S GONE TO A BETTER PLACE.

WHAT, UH, *HAPPENED* TO BERSERKER?

LIKE, METAPHORICALLY, OR..

NO. LIKE THE BEACH.

BUT *NOT* THE MOON.

AM I THE ONLY ONE CONFUSED BY THAT?

I'M A LITTLE LOST ON THE WHOLE BEACH/MOON THING AS WELL.

SIR, COULD YOU BE MORE SPECIFIC? THANKS.

ABSOLUTELY

HE IS LOCKED IN PERPETUAL ORBIT AROUND A POINT THREE SECONDS TO THE LEFT OF THE FUTURE

THAT DIDN'T HELP ME.

HE *WAS* SPECIFIC. YOU HAVE TO GIVE HIM THAT

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

IT MEANS THERE'S NOT MUCH POINT IN TALKING ABOUT HIM.

THAT DOESN'T MAKE *SENSE*.

THINGS DON'T JUST *HAPPEN* I DEMAND A RATIONAL EXPLANATION.

YOUR BRAIN CAN'T *PROCESS* SIX OF THE VERB TENSES NEEDED TO EXPLAIN IT TO YOU

SO, YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO BELIEVE ME.

BELIEF WITHOUT EVIDENCE? WHAT DO YOU TAKE ME FOR, A NOT-AT-ALL-ATHEIST?

FINE, I DON'T CARE. ENJOY YOUR EVIDENCE.

I HOPE WITNESSING THE UNKNOWABLE PUTS INTO PERSPECTIVE YOUR WASTED AND MEANINGLESS LIFE.

POOF

THIS IS AN ALARMING TREND

IS IT?

ONLY PEOPLE WHO *AREN'T* US HAVE DISAPPEARED, ROGUE

SHOULD THIS PATTERN *CONTINUE*, WE OUGHT TO BE FINE

WHY DOES THAT MAKES *MORE* SENSE THAN I THINK IT SHOULD?

DON'T QUESTION IT!

RIGHT OKAY.

I HAVE TO BELIEVE THAT THIS WILL WORK OUT IN THE END

THAT'S A SHAME.

[redacted] AND FAITH FAILED ME WHERE THE BOW SHALL NOT!

A BOW AND AN ARROW. REALLY

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NO. NOT A BOW AND ARROW

BUT RATHER IT IS A BOW AND THREE ARROWS!

MAKE IT THIRTY. I *STILL* WOULDN'T CARE, BUT IT'D AT LEAST BE IMPRESSIVE.

THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING OF YOUR DOWNFALL, WIZARD

WHY DON'T YOU GET UNCLE SARDA A DRINK. HE HAS TO KILL A MAN.

AGAIN.

NOW THEN

"WIZARD"? ARE YOU KIDDING ME? *WIZARDS* DO PARLOR TRICKS, *I* THROTTLE THE HEAVENS.

BEHOLD! FOR AS A RANGER, I POSSES THE RARE AND ENVIABLE *DUAL-WIELD!*

HAVE YOU A SENSE OF THE SUDDEN AND VIOLENT BREVITY OF YOUR FUTURE?

THAT'S... THIS IS WHAT YOU'RE GOING WITH? DUAL-WIELD

MOREOVER! AS A RANGER/RANGER, I CAN DUAL-WIELD *MY* *DUAL-WIELD!*

WHAT

BEHOLD THE MYTHICAL ART OF QUAD-WIELDING AND ITS *DODECARROW* STORM!

HOW ARE YOU HOLDING THOSE?

IT'S NOT EASY

REALLY HURTS THE NECK.

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THIS IS IT. YOUR LIFE OF WHAT I MUST ASSUME TO HAVE BEEN A LOT OF TYRANNY IS AT ITS END!

I CAN'T SEE..

UM. ARE YOU STI... THERE?

YES.

AH-HA! IT WAS A TRICK, FOR WHICH YOU FELL.

WHEREAS PREVIOUSLY YOUR LOCATION WAS UNKNOWN TO ME, YOUR **VOICE** HAS GIVEN AWAY YOUR POSITION!

UM.

PERHAPS YOU COULD SAY SOMETHING ELSE FOR ME

OR MAYBE WHISTLE? OR STAMP YOUR FEET? ANY SORT OF NOISE WOULD HELP OUT.

FINE. IT DOESN'T MATTER. I'VE NOCKED ENOUGH ARROWS TO QUALIFY AS A PIECE OF ARTILLERY

BOO.

AH!

BOOM

GUESS I RAN OUT OF PARENTS.

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I'M NOT DEAD?

BY THE WAY

DO YOU KNOW THE BEST THING ABOUT MAGIC?

NO.

NO. THAT WOULD BE STUPID

A PACKAGE? FROM RANGER?

WHAT SPOILS HAS MY HUSBAND PROCURED?

EVERYTHING

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WHAT HAPPENED TO THAT ARROW GUY?

OH, HIM?

HONEY, I'M HOME

APPARENTLY.

HMM, A NOTE. COVERED IN BLOOD, HAIR, AND BRAIN.

"DINNER IS IN THE FRIDGE.

-YOUR WIFE"

HOW STRANGE THAT SHE WOULD NOT USE HER NAME OR HAND-WRITING. OH WELL!

O.J., PURPLE STUFF, MY BRUTALLY MURDERED WIFE..

HE WENT HOME

FOREVER.

I'VE NEVER HAD A HOME.

NOT FOR VERY LONG, ANYWAY.

THAT'S FUNNY, I DON'T REMEMBER ASKING TO HEAR ALL ABOUT YOUR DULL LITTLE LIFE-STORY

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WHAT ARE YOU TELLING ME?

YOU NEVER HAD GOT TO ABSORB THE INFINITE AND PERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF HOW TO DESTROY THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE?

I GUESS NOT OTHER STUFF CAME UP

ALL YOU HAD TO *DO* WAS LOOK AT A THING!

THE PHRASE "HUGE KNOCKERS" WAS BEING TOSSED AROUND.

DON'T JUDGE ME, MAN.

YOU ARE THE WORST PERSON *IN THE WORLD* TO AVATAR FOR, YOU KNOW

OH, THAT'S *PROBABLY* DEBATABLE.

AND THAT'S A DETAILED REPORT OF EVERYONE'S ROLE IN YOU'RE NOT EVEN *TRYING* TO LISTEN, ARE YOU.

HEY, I GOT ABSOLUTELY EVERY-THING BEFORE YOU SAID "THE"

AS IN "THE THING I NEED TO TELL YOU IS"?

SURE, I DUNNO

OKAY WE'RE DONE HERE.

FAIR ENOUGH. I DIDN'T WANT TO HELP YOU KILL EVERYONE ANY-WAY

AND *THAT* BE HOW WE OUGHTA GO KILLIN' THEM BLASTED WARRIORS WHAT BE OF LIGHT

A FINE PLAN, BIKKE, BUT I'M NOT SURE WHERE WE'LL FIND GALLEONS AT THIS, OR ANY HOUR

YAR, THE PLAN SOMEWHAT DEPENDS UPON EASY ACCESS TO A FLEET OF THEM, TIS TRUE.

- OKAY, - SHUT UP, WE'RE KILLING THEM IN THEIR SLEEP. THE END.

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I DON'T KNOW WHAT I WAS EXPECTING, BUT IT WASN'T THIS, I'LL TELL YOU THAT MUCH.

I GUESS IT MAKES SENSE. THEY BICKER LIKE AN OLD MARRIED COUPLE.

A COUPLE OF MARRIED COUPLES.

I WONDER WHO'S MARRIED TO WHOM.

WHAT IF THEY'RE ALL INTER-MARRIED?

I BET THE MARRIAGES THEMSELVES ARE MARRIED TO EACH OTHER.

LIKE A LEGAL LOOPHOLE THING.

THERE'S NO...YOU CAN'T MARRY THINGS THAT AREN'T BEINGS, AND WHY WOULD THEY DO THAT EVEN IF YOU COULD?!

FOR TAX PURPOSES.

SO, ARE WE KILLING THEM OR WHAT?

LOOK AT THESE GUYS.

THEY'RE SO CLOSE AS TEAMMATES THEY'RE PERFECTLY AT EASE SLEEPING TOGETHER I WISH WE COULD BE MORE LIKE THAT

YEAH I SAID IT

EARLIER..

NOPE, NOT GONNA DO IT.

IT'S NOT GAY IF THREE GUYS DO IT.

I.. WHAT?

NO ONE WANTS THE FLOOR.

BUT!

IT TAKES TWO PEOPLE TO BE GAY

SO, ONE AND THREE ARE SAFE

REALLY?

YEAH. IT'S TOTALLY A RULE

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JUST GET OUT OF HERE. ALL OF YOU.

YOU'RE MAKING IT TOO AWKWARD TO KILL. SHOO!

FINALLY.

GODDAMMIT.

COULDN'T DO IT, COULD YOU?

GODDAMMIT.

I COULDN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT HOW *PEACEFUL* THEY LOOKED.

AND I WAS SO *JEALOUS* OF THEM!

THIS IS *YOUR* FAULT.

SHHH LET THE HEALING BEGIN.

"HEALING" IS CODE FOR GROUP HUG, ISN'T IT?

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OKAY, SO WE CAN'T KILL THEM *OURSELVES* BECAUSE THEY'RE LIKE NAPPING KITTENS AND IT MAKES US EMOTIONAL.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

JUST FOLLOW ME.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I THINK WE'RE IN THE BASEMENT.

YAR, BE THE PLAN TO LURE THEM IN HERE FOR TO KILLIN' 'EM WITH RADON?

WHAT IF HIS PLAN IS TO LURE *US* DOWN HERE?

YE MUTINOUS CUR!

[illegible] STOP BEING STUPID.

THIS IS WHERE ALL THE BIG SUMMONING HAPPENS.

OR IN THE BASEMENT?

OKAY, I ADMIT THE *DECORUM* IS LACKING.

BUT IT'S BECAUSE WE USED UP ALL THE EVIL TO MAKE THE OUTSIDE COOL.

TEMPLE OF FIENDS

WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO SUMMON?

SIMPLE.

THE LIGHT WARRIORS' WORST NIGHTMARES.

LIKE BAD HANGNAILS WHAT GET CAUGHT ON YE PANTALOONS' POCKETS?

SURE, BIKKE.

LIKE THAT.

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LIKE FINDING A DEAD RAT IN THEIR FOOD?

OH OR A SEVERED FINGER

FIENDISH! YOU'D NEVER FEEL COMFORTABLE EATING AT A RESTAURANT AGAIN! NICE ONE, SLEET.

I THINK YOU'RE ALL TAKING "NIGHTMARES" TOO LITERALLY.

I THINK YOU'RE IGNORING THE STRATEGIC BENEFIT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE.

HOW ABOUT THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE OF SUMMONING UP SOME HUGE AND EVIL MONSTERS THAT WILL KILL THEM?

CAN IT BE A HUGE AND EVIL RAT CREATURE, WHICH WE KILL FIRST AND PUT INTO THEIR FOOD?

I DON'T THINK YOU FOLLOW.

OH, BUT WE DO. ONCE THEY'RE DEMORALIZED FROM THE RAT INCIDENT, IT'LL BE ALL THE EASIER FOR THE HUGE AND EVIL RAT CREATURE TO KILL THEM!

THE RAT CREATURE YOU WANT TO KILL TO PUT INTO THEIR FOOD.

PERHAPS WE COULD SUMMON TWO RAT CREATURES THEN?

YOU DO THIS EVERY TIME.

THIS PLAN IS SIMPLE. WHY DO YOU SEEK IDIOTIC COMPLICATIONS?

AYE, TIS TRUE.

WE NEED ONLY BRING ABOUT OUR BROADSIDE AND BE THE FIRST WHAT TO FIRE.

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LET'S SAY YOU MEANT THAT METAPHORICALLY, BIKKE.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT NO "MEDAFROHICKY" BE. ALL I'S KNOWIN' IS YE BETTER TURN THIS SHIP ABOUT TO SHOOT THEM BROADSIDE

SHIP? WE'RE IN A TEMPLE.

AYE! TEMPLES BE THE SHIPS O' THE LAND EVERYONE KNOWS THAT

I HAVE NOTHING TO SAY TO THAT, BECAUSE THERE IS NOTHING TO SAY.

I THINK WHAT BIKKE MEANS—

WHO CARES!

HE'S ILLITERATE, CAN'T COUNT, AND SLIGHTLY DRUNK AT ALL TIMES.

I WOULDN'T SAY SLIGHTLY

WE'RE NOT TAKING NAVAL-INSPIRED ADVICE FROM A MAN LESS SEA-WORTHY THAN BAG FULL OF ROCKS.

WE ARE SUMMONING FELL UNDERBEASTS FROM THE DEPTHS OF HELL TO DO OUR BIDDING AND THAT'S FINAL.

YOU MEAN OUR BIDDING, OF COURSE

THAT IS WHAT I SAID.

OH. I ASSUMED YOU'D SLIP UP AND SAY "MY"

WELL, I'M A GOOD LIAR.

NOW LET'S GET TO WORK BEFORE YOU THINK ABOUT THAT TOO MUCH.

SOUNDS REASONABLE TO ME.

FIRST, I NEED YOU THREE TO STAND IN THE CIRCLE OF FATAL SACRIFICES.

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OKAY. ACCORDING TO THIS SPELL, WE'RE READY TO SUMMON UP A JUICY HELL LORD.

ONE QUESTION.

WHEN YOU CALLED THIS THE CIRCLE OF FATAL SACRIFICES, WHAT EXACTLY DID YOU MEAN BY THAT?

PROBABLY NOTHING SINISTER.

OH, CARRY ON.

AS THEY SAY, "ALWAYS TRUST [illegible]"

THEY DO BE SAYING THAT

"ON OPPOSITE DAY

SHIT, THEY'RE ON TO ME.

I SHOULD BE UPSET, BUT I CAN'T HELP TAKING THIS AS A HUGE COMPLIMENT.

"YOU CAN'T SUMMON SOMETHING AS POWERFUL AS HELL LORDS WITHOUT SACRIFICING WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU IN THE WORLD!

[illegible] HAS EVER DONE

1 Lead morons into basement to kill them.

2. Kill them.

3 Summon nothing, because it was a lie.

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And then it was a new day in the most doomed world in the...world.

HAVE YOU SEEN DRIZZ'L? WE'RE HUNTING HIM DOWN LIKE A RABID DOG BECAUSE HE TRIED TO KILL US LAST NIGHT.

NO. BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY THE LACK OF YOUR CORPSES MAKES ME SAD.

WAIT, WAIT WAIT DRIZZ'L IS A *DOG*?

THEIR CORPSES TOO.

HEY! WHAT'D I DO?!

AFTER *EVERYTHING* YOU HAVE DONE SINCE WE MET, DO YOU THINK I NEED NEW REASONS?

"MYAMYA MYAMYA *NEW* REASONS?"

KEEP DIGGING THAT GRAVE

THAT WAS NOT ONE OF MY BETTER MASTER PLANS.

BUT, HEY, IT'S BEEN A WHILE. I'M OUT OF THE ZONE. THAT WAS PRACTICE. THAT'S ALL.

SOMEONE ORDER SOME FIENDS?

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WELL, THIS IS THE TEMPLE OF FIENDS.

THEN WE'RE IN THE RIGHT PLACE.

I DIDN'T ORDER ANY FIENDS THOUGH.

THEN I GUESS WE HAVE TO DO SOMEONE ELSE'S BIDDING.

AND WHAT I MEANT BY THAT WAS I SUMMONED FIENDS. YOU SEE?

HEY, WE WEREN'T PULLED FROM THE DEPTHS OF HELL TO ARGUE SEMANTICS WITH AN ELF

UH, I HOPE

I SWEAR, KIDS THESE DAYS.

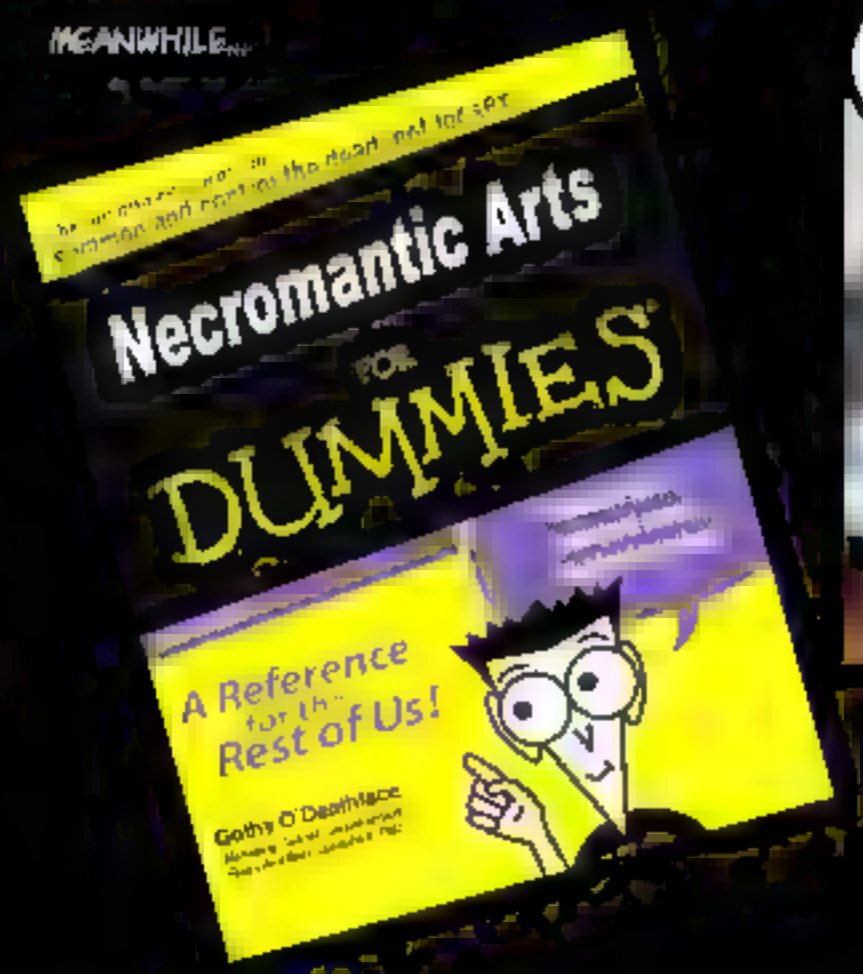
THEY GET A BOOK AT THE MA... AND THEY THINK THAT MAKES THEM A NECRO-MANCER

OKAY, NO SEMANTICS. WE'LL DO EVIL. WE'LL DO WICKED EVIL.

AND NOT YOUR HOMEWORK? I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW MANY DEMONS I'VE SEEN CALLED UPON TO DO HOMEWORK.

NO. WE'LL MURDER. IT'LL BE GREAT.

MEANWHILE...



SULK KNEW HE SHOULD HAVE SACRIFICED CURE ALBUMS INSTEAD OF MORRISSEY

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I NEED YOU GUYS TO KILL THE LIGHT WARRIORS.

THE LIGHT [redacted]?

- YOU'VE - HEARD OF THEM THEN?

HEARD OF THEM? THEY ROBBED ME OF BELOVED MINIONS, WHOM I REQUIRE TO EXPRESS THE TRUE DEPTHS OF MY EVIL BY SLAUGHTERING THEM SENSELESSLY!

THOUGH AN ALTERNATIVE POINT OF VIEW WOULD BE THAT MY SENSELESS SLAUGHTER OF MINIONS EVENTUALLY LED TO A DEARTH OF MINIONS.

BUT THAT'S *NOT* THE KIND OF THINKING THAT KEEPS YOU FROM GETTING SLAUGHTERED

AND THEY KILLED ME.

AND ME.

TO SAY THEY KILLED *ME* GIVES THEM ENTIRELY TOO MUCH CREDIT, BUT I SHOULD LIKE TO SEE THAT ELF WEAR HIS ENTRAILS LIKE A *NOOSE* ALL THE SAME

IS THERE *ANYONE* WITHOUT GRIEVANCE AGAINST - THEM? -

SO AFTER WE "SAVE" THE WORLD, I FIGURE THAT GIVES US THE MORAL AUTHORITY TO LEVY A SAVIOR TAX ON, WELL, EVERYTHING

BY WHICH I MEAN EVERYTHING THAT EVER WAS AND WILL BE

HOW ABOUT HYPOTHETICALS AND THINGS THAT NEVER WERE?

ONE DAY AT A TIME, BLACK MAGE.

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OKAY, BUT FIRST YOU'RE GOING TO KILL SOME OTHER GUYS FOR ME.

THINK OF THEM AS A WARM UP.

DID SOMEONE SAY WARM UP?!

FIRE!

NEW RULE. NO ONE SAY ANYTHING REMOTELY RELATED TO FIRE. -

DID SOMEONE SAY ANYTHING REMOTELY RELATED TO FIRE?!

OKAY. I DESERVE THIS.

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THERE, YOUR TARGETS UPON WHICH YOU WILL PRACTICE BEFORE THE MAIN EVENT! KILL THEM!

HEY, DAD

HI SON.

DAD?

SON?

WOW, OKAY. THIS WHOLE THING KIND OF *HINGED* ON NO ONE BEING RELATED.

HOW DOES THAT EVEN WORK?

YOU MEAN *HOW* DOES A SKELETON SIRE A VAMPIRE?

NO, OR RATHER, YES. BUT *ALSO*, HOW DOES HE SIRE ANYTHING?

WITHOUT GETTING INTO THE TECHNICALITIES, SKELETONS DON'T HAVE...UH, ANYTHING Y'KNOW...TO WORK WITH. —

YOU'RE A... JUST WAITING FOR ME TO SAY "BONED" AREN'T YOU.

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HEY, LOOK AT ME! I'M AN UGLY JACKASS WHO TALKS ABOUT STATS!

DURR, HUR HUR DURR!

I DON'T GET IT.

IS THAT... IS IT BLACK BELT?

WHAT? NO, LISTEN.

DUR HUR, I WEAR A DRESS SOMETIMES.

HEY, LET'S DO SOME QUESTS AND LEVEL UP THE GAME!

THAT'S A ***TERRIBLE*** BLACK BELT, MAN.

WELL, IT'S CLOSE HE ***DID*** USE HIS MOUTH TO SPEAK.

I GUESS. BUT BEYOND THAT?

IT'S RED MAGE. YOU KNOW IT'S RED MAGE, WHY ARE YOU BEING JERKS?

RED MAGE?

I DON'T SEE IT.

I'M WEARING HIS GODDAMNED HAT

HOW'D YOU GET THAT FROM HIM ANY-WAY?

I TOOK IT FROM HIS CORPSE

HE'S DEAD?

YEAH.

OR NOT I DON'T KNOW

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HE DOESN'T LOOK DEAD.

HERE, WE CAN FIX THAT

I THINK FIGHTER *MEANS* IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S IN A COMA.

YOU SEE A LOT OF STANDING COMAS IN ELF LAND, DO YOU?

OKAY AND *STANDING* WHILE DEAD MAKES SO MUCH *MORE* SENSE.

SKELETONS, ZOMBIES, *VAMPIRES*, AND THE OCCASIONAL ZOMBULL

ARE ALL *UN*DEAD AND THAT'S COMPLETELY DIFFERENT AS NOTED BY THE USE OF "UN-"

WHAT DID THEY *TEACH* YOU IN CLOWN SCHOOL ANY-WAY?

NOTHING! I MEAN, IT WASN'T FOR CLOWNS ONLY, IT...SHUT UP

LOOK, I JUST WANT TO BELIEVE THAT RED MAGE IS DEAD. IS THAT WRONG? *REALLY?*

SERIOUSLY, WHO HERE *HAS NOT* WISHED HIM DEAD?

WHO HERE WHO COUNTS?

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WE CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE A MEMBER WHEN WE'RE *THIS* CLOSE TO THE END

JUST BECAUSE HE'S USELESS NOW *DOESN'T* MEAN HE'S LESS USEFUL THAN HE USED TO BE

I'M LISTENING.

HE CAN'T CAST SPELLS OR FIGHT, BUT HONESTLY, HE WAS PRETTY *CRAP* AT THOSE THINGS BEFORE.

IN THAT LIGHT, WHAT *HAS* CHANGED?

HE'S QUIETER NOW.

IS *THAT* A COMPLAINT?

GOD, NO.

HERE'S OUR OPTIONS AS I SEE THEM.

USE HIM AS A LIVING SWORD

OR A LIVING CLUB.

LIVING *ARMOR* MAYBE

OR A LIVING SHIELD

WOULDN'T THAT BE THE SAME AS..

OF FIRE!

THAT'S A *LONG* WAY TO GO JUST TO HURT SOME-ONE.

YEAH.

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SO, REALLY, LEX LUTHOR IS THE HERO.

YEAH, TO *VILLAINS*.

NO, THINK ABOUT IT

SUPERMAN IS THE INVADER. HE'S THE ANOMALY. HE'S THE THING THAT DOESN'T BELONG.

AND WHAT'S HE DO?

HE ROBS HUMANITY OF ITS DRIVE.

WHY [illegible] AT *ANYTHING* WHEN SUPERMAN IS ALREADY, BY *DEFINITION*, INHUMANLY BETTER THAN YOU AT *EVERYTHING*?

LEX LUTHOR IS GIVING US BACK OUR DIGNITY

AND HE DOES THIS EVEN WHILE HE'S LABELED A VILLAIN FOR DOING IT

HOW SICK IS *THAT*?

THE PEOPLE OF HIS SOCIETY ARE SO INVESTED IN SUPERMAN'S SUPERIORITY THAT THEY FIGHT TO LOCK UP THE MAN WHO DARES SUGGEST THEY MAY ACTUALLY HAVE SOME WORTH.

WE SHOULD ALL ASPIRE TO BE LEX LUTHOR.

YOU GONNA TAKE CARE OF THAT OR?

NAW, HE'S DOING GREAT

BESIDES, I DON'T THINK HE'D *WANT* OUR HELP IF HE WAS CONSCIOUS. OR *ALIVE*.

WHICHEVER.

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SO,

YEAH.

YOU TRIED TO KILL US.

THIS'LL SOUND STRANGE, BUT I HAD A *REALLY* GOOD REASON FOR IT.

SUCH AS?

YOUR DEATHS WOULD HAVE MADE ME HAPPY.

THAT'S... THAT'S A TERRIBLE REASON, BY EVERY METRIC.

BUT *NOT* BY THE METRIC OF MY HAPPINESS.

HE *DO* BE HAVIN' A POINT

CODE O' THE PIRATES: YE BE ENCOURAGED TO KILL FOR PERSONAL GAIN, FOR PLEASURE, OR BOREDOM.

DO PIRATE CODES APPLY ON LAND?

LAND BE A KIND OF SEA.

HE'S NOT A PIRATE!

EVEN MORE IMPRESSIVE THAT HE BE LIVIN' UP TO THE CODES THEN.

AM I BACK ON THE TEAM NOW OR WHAT?

YOU HAVE TO PROMISE THAT YOU WON'T KILL US.

NO, I WILL NEVER MAKE THAT PROMISE.

I'M SO PROUD OF YE.

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WHAT'VE YOU BEEN UP TO, SON?

OH, YOU KNOW HANGING OUT WITH MY FRIENDS BRINGING RUIN TO THE WORLD

THAT'S GOOD, HONEST WORK

HOW ABOUT YOU?

RULING HELL HAS BEEN A *CHALLENGING* BUT REWARDING EXPERIENCE

WAIT, WHAT?

HELL. THE PLACE I'VE BEEN. REMEMBER WHEN DADDY WAS KILLED ON THE LAWN?

YOU WENT TO HELL?

WHERE DID YOU THINK I WAS?

I DUNNO. A BUSINESS TRIP. I GUESS.

A BUSINESS TRIP FOR ALL TH.S TIME?

WELL, I DIDN'T KNOW. DID I?

YOU TREAT ME LIKE A CHILD, *DAMN*! I'M 700 YEARS OLD!

AND AS LONG AS YOU UNLIVE UNDER MY ROOF, YOU'LL DO AS I SAY

I LIVE IN A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT BASEMENT NOW DAD! YOU CAN'T TELL ME WHAT TO DO!

UNLESS YOU CALL

T.MES LIKE TH.S I WONDER IF YOU'RE MY KID

BUT, I USE CREEPY UNDEAD M.ND CONTROL ON YOUR MOTHERS, SO UNFORTUANTELY, YOU ARE.

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HELLO?

AH-HA! WE AMBUSHED YOU!

I...SAID HELLO!

IT'S A MISTAKE TO THINK OF AMBUSHES IN TERMS OF EITHER/OR, YOU KNOW

THERE'S A WHOLE SPECTRUM I CHARTED IT OUT. ACTUA...Y

A CHART?

A CHART

I'D LOVE TO SEE THAT.

GOOD I DIDN'T MAKE IT TO NEVER BE SEEN.

IT'S IN ONE OF THESE POCKETS...

CRUNK!

BOOYA! THAT WAS THE AMBUSH, MUTHA FUGGA!

WELL PLAYED.

CAN I TAKE OFF MY FIRE HELM YET? IT'S A LITTLE ON FIRE.

NO, YOU'RE DOIN' FINE.

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BUZZ OFF, YOU'RE CRAMPING MY ACT

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

HEY LOOK, THEY DON'T CALL THIS AMBUSH ALLEY FOR NUTHIN'

NO ONE CALLS IT THAT

THEY WI...

SEE, WHILE *YOU'VE* BEEN FAFFING AROUND LIKE A USELESS HANGER-ON SINCE THAT'S ALL YOU KNOW, I'VE BEEN ELIMINATING OUR ENEMIES ONE BY ONE.

WHERE'S THE OTHER ONE?

"ONE BY ONE" HAS TO START SOME-WHERE!

AND END THERE TOO.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

IT'S JUST A HALLWAY AND THEY'RE ON THE OTHER SIDE

THEY CAN SEE YOU.

REMEMBER, IF A HANDSOME BUT INVINCIBLE WARRIOR WITH A FIRE HELM IS TRYING TO KILL YOU, THAT'S ME AND IT'S AN AMBUSH, SO LOOK OUT

ALSO, SOME OTHER FACTORS.

I CAN'T BELIEVE FIGHTER IS LETTING ALL THAT FIRE HELM GO TO WASTE.

AND I CAN'T BELIEVE HE'S STILL ON FIRE

RED MAGE IS THE *BEST* DAMN KINDLING THIS TEAM EVER HAD!

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ISN'T THAT A LITTLE WARM?

WELL, IT'S A **FIRE HELM**. IT AIN'T GONNA BE NOT **ON FIRE**. THAT'S STUPID.

WHAT IF I SAID IT SEEMS LESS ~ LIKE A HELM AND MORE LIKE ONE OF YOUR TEAMMATES SET ANOTHER ONE OF YOUR TEAMMATES ON FIRE?

IT'S **ON MY HEAD** IT'S A HELM. DO I HAVE TO DRAW YOU A MAP?

AND THAT'S HOW THE CONVERSATION ENDED.

HERE THEY COME. LOOK LIKE YOU'RE **NOT** GOING TO AMBUSH THEM.

I'M NOT

RIGHT **JUST** LIKE THAT

ONE OF YOUR **IDIOTS** WAS TALKING ABOUT AN AMBUSH. I WANTED TO...HRM.

WHY AM I TALLER NOW?

YOU'RE STANDING ON GARLAND

OH.

I WANTED TO PUT AN END TO THIS **INANE** BUSINESS.

OF COURSE. JUST LET ME CHECK MY POCKETS.

NOW, **NOW**, NOW--KILL!

GODDAMMIT

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ANYWAY, I *RE-TEAMED* UP WITH MY TEAM TO DESTROY YOU GUYS.

HOLD IT! WE HAD A PLAN TO BACKSTAB OUR TEAMS INTO BLOODY LUMPS OF OUR OWN PERSONAL GLORIES.

WE *DID*. RIGHT UP TO THE POINT WHERE I BACK-STABBED YOU FOR MY SPECIFIC PERSONAL GLORY.

YOU BACKSTABBED *ME?*

HOW UNFORESEEABLE. *ALTERNATIVELY*: OH.

YOU DON'T *GET* TO BE PISSED OFF YOU WERE COLLUDING WITH THE ENEMY!

I WOULD HAVE DOUBLE-CROSSED HIM TO DEATH BEFORE DOUBLE-CROSSING YOU GUYS.

THAT'S NOT AS BAD.

SO, ALL THAT TALK ABOUT ELVEN SOLIDARITY WAS A LIE.

BUT IN MY DEFENSE, I ONLY LIED BECAUSE I THOUGHT YOUR DEATH WOULD BENEFIT ME.

I'M GOING TO BE THE BIGGER ELF HERE. I'M NOT EVEN UPSET.

MOSTLY BECAUSE I HAVE *FIENDS!*

JUST NOT *WITH* ME.

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YOU ARE NOT GOOD AT THIS WHOLE SUMMONING AN ULTIMATE WEAPON TO DEFEAT YOUR FOES THING.

I MEAN, IT'S BAD ENOUGH THEY DIDN'T SHOW UP HOW EMBARASSING FOR YOU.

BUT THE REASON THEY DIDN'T SHOW UP IS THAT THEY'RE DEAD BECAUSE WE KILLED THE CRAP OUT OF THEM.

AND DON'T LOOK INTO IT, BUT THEY WERE **REALLY** EASY TO KILL.

LIKE, **STUPID** EASY

WHAT DO YOU **DO**, DRIZZ'L? GET SUMMONING MATERIA FROM CRACKER JACK BOXES?

WE DARK ELVES ARE STRICTLY CRUNCH-N-MUNCH PEOPLE.

AHHHH, SHUT UP.

THEY WERE SUMMONED, POSSIBLY BY ME, AND THEY **ARE** HERE, JUST NOT RIGHT HERE NOW.

SURE THEY ARE. THEY'RE BACK **FROM THE GRAVE**.

AND MORE POWERFUL THAN EVER. OOOH.

STOP, THIEF!

JUST **TALKING** ABOUT IT MAKES ME SO SCARED I'M ABOUT TO SHIT YOUR PANTS.

YEAH, I... **WHAT?**

'CAUSE IT'S AS IMPOSSIBLE AS THIS SCRUB HAVING ACCESS TO **ULTRA-FIENDS** FROM BEYOND HELL.

I MEAN, WHERE'D HE GET THEM? FROM HIS GIRLFRIEND, SHE'S FROM LEFLEIN, WE DON'T KNOW HER?

WE WERE PEN PALS.

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YOU GUYS ARE GOING TO EAT YOUR WORDS WHEN MY FIENDS SHOW UP AND KILL YOU.

YEAH, WE'RE REALLY WORRIED ABOUT THAT

HEY, GUYS! LOOK WHO I FOUND!

WHAT THE--

GODDAMMIT, MY PANTS!

SORRY.

I MET OUR OLD FRIENDS, WHO COINCIDENTALLY, ARE ALSO OUR WORST ENEMIES.

REMEMBER? WE KILLED THEM? THEY SAY IT'S OUR TURN NOW

I THINK IT COULD BE FUN IF "KILLING" MEANS WHAT I DON'T THINK IT MEANS.

THAT'S SUPER.

I HAVE TO NINJA UP SOME *LAUNDRY*.

ALL RIGHT, *BLACK MAGE*! IT'S YOU AND ME VS. THE WORLD LIKE IN THE OLD DAYS!

YES.

JUST LIKE THE OLD DAYS.

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YOUR FRIENDS HAVE *ABANDONED* YOU.

IT MAY APPEAR THAT WAY, *BUT* IT'S A MULTI-TRAP!

THIEF HAS NINJA-ED HIMSELF INTO THE PERFECT KILLZONE

THIEF! GIVE NO SIGN THAT YOU ARE READY

OH, SHIT DID YOU GUYS NOT HEAR THAT TOO?

I *THINK* I DIDN'T

FURTHERMORE!

BLACK MAGE INITIATED PHASE ONE OF OUR DEADLY DUAL TECH.

IT'S THE ONE WHERE I TAKE ALL THE HITS, AND DO ALL THE WORK WHILE BLACK MAGE SUPERVISES FROM A VERY, *VERY* SAFE DISTANCE.

AND THEN THERE'S RED MAGE THE WILDCARD. I DON'T PRETEND TO KNOW WHAT HE'S SAYING HALF THE TIME, BUT I KNOW THIS MUCH!

HE'S ALREADY BEATEN YOU.

WHEREVER HE MAY BE

IN HIS *MIND*!

THESE GUYS SOUND TOUGH.

THEY HAVE BECOME EVEN MORE POWERFUL.

WE SHALL EVEN THE PLAYING FIELD BY FACING THEM UNITED AS A GROUP

THEN SO BE IT!

THE FOUR OF YOU VERSUS THE FOUR OF US!

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I MUST WARN YOU, EVIL MONSTER GUYS, MY FIRE HELM MAKES ME *SUPER INVINC-IBLE.*

IS THAT A FACT?

I CAN'T PROVE IT'S *NOT*, SO IT OBVIOUSLY MUST BE.

KARY, WHY DON'T YOU SHOW THIS PILE OF HAIR WHAT YOU THINK OF HIS LITTLE FIRE HELM?

THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT

THANK YOU

CAN WE SKIP THE PRE-BATTLE PAGEANTRY AND GET STRAIGHT TO KILLING THIS GUY?

HOLD IT!

AWW, MY FIRE HELM.

YOU FOUR ARE IN DIRECT VIOLATION OF THE *ONE BOSS AT A TIME* ACT

ALSO, WHERE IS MY HAT?

SEE, LOOK AT THAT

THERE'S TWO OF THEM NOW.

IF THAT'S NOT REASON ENOUGH TO KILL THEM, I DON'T KNOW WHAT IS.

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HOLD IT!

I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD! AND THEN I SET YOU ON FIRE TO MAKE SURE.

OH, IT'S QUITE SIMPLE, REALLY

YEAH, I DOUBT THAT

I LOOKED 'PON THE DATASPHERE AND MY MIND **BURST** I BECAME A PART OF EVERYTHING.

FOR ONE PERFECT INSTANT I KNEW THE POSITION AND VELOCITY OF ALL CREATION.

CALLING IT MERELY "BEAUTIFUL" OR "ENLIGHTENING" ONLY INSULTS THE EXPERIENCE. WE ARE AS A MOTE OF DUST RESTING ON A MASTER-PIECE.

TINY

INCONSEQUENTIAL

IGNORANT

BLACK MAGE.

I KNOW ALL THE MOVES IN THE GAME.

OKAY. LET ME SEE IF I'VE GOT THIS.

EXCUSE US.

YOU SHUT THE **GODDAMN HELL UP**, SUPER MONSTERS.

I "GET" TO LEARN MAGIC ABILITIES IF I AM LUCKY ENOUGH TO SURVIVE THEM BEING CAST ON ME.

SO FAR THIS CONSISTS OF A CROTCH KICK **AND** PUKING OUT MY ORGANS.

YOU GET TOTAL ENLIGHTEN-MENT BY LOOKING AT A BOX.

YUP.

I'M GOING TO **CHOKE** ON MY ENDLESS RAGE NOW. EXCUSE ME.

GHKK!

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WHAT'S WRONG WITH HIM?

OH, THE GROSS INEQUITIES OF THE UNIVERSE FINALLY CRUSHED HIS SPIRIT

IS THAT LIKE A DISGUSTING ***FINANCIAL*** THING OR WHAT?

NO.

THE VAST CHASM BETWEEN WHAT HE WANTS AND WHAT HE ***GETS*** PROBABLY STRAINED HIS SANITY TO ITS BREAKING POINT

WHAT'S THAT WEIRD SOUND?

HIS TONGUE GOING DOWN HIS THROAT

UH, SHOULD WE HELP HIM?

WE'D GET ***DROOL*** ON OUR FINGERS, NO WAY

GOOD POINT

WILL HE DIE?

WELL, NO, NOT NECESSARILY THERE'S A CHANCE HIS IMPOTENT RAGE IS SO POWERFUL THAT HE'LL COLLAPSE INTO A SINGULARITY OF HATE

LET'S WATCH!

GODDAMN, WHAT'S IT TAKE TO GET YOU MORONS TO KILL EACH OTHER, ANYWAY?

I MEAN ***HELLO.***

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I DON'T KNOW WHY I'M SURPRISED

I HAVE TOTAL CONSCIOUSNESS ACROSS TIME, SO I KNEW THIS WAS GOING TO HAPPEN BEFORE I MET ANY OF YOU.

ALSO, YOU'RE ALL PREDICTABLY INCOMPETENT

ANYWAY. KEEP THE MURDER DOWN TO A DULL ROAR WHILE I UNPACK

UNPACK? THIS IS MY TEMPLE.

THAT I HIJACKED

YOU'LL BE DEAD WITHIN THE HOUR AND THIS TEMPLE WILL REGAIN ITS FORMER GLORY AS UNHOLY GROUND DEDICATED TO HIDEOUS MONSTER GODS.

WOW

LOOK AT ALL THAT SECRET PLAN THEY DIDN'T NEED TO HEAR. GOOD WORK

THEY WERE GOING TO FIND OUT SOONER OR LATER ANYWAY

YES, WHEN THEY DIED

YOU KIDS HAVE A LOT TO TALK ABOUT

I SUGGEST USING THE TIME-HONORED FORMAT OF GLADIATORIAL DEBATE.

MEANWHILE, MY ***LUGGAGE*** AND I WILL GET OUT OF YOUR WAY

I'M NOT LUGGAGE, SARDA.

OF COURSE YOU'RE NOT

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TINK

KTINK

TINK

KLUNK

THIS IS REALLY WEIRD LUGGAGE, MR SARDA.

I'M A REALLY WEIRD GUY

SO, IT'S A FIGHT TO THE DEATH AND WE'RE DOWN BY *TWO* MEN.

WAIT, TWO?

WELL, ONE IS *THIEF* AND THE OTHER IS ABOUT TO BE ME BECAUSE I'M A COWARD

OH. YOU CONSIDERED YOURSELF TO BE A POTENTIAL RESOURCE IN THIS FIGHT?

THAT'S CUTE

WHAT IN THE HELL IS THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

WELL, FIGHTER *ALONE* IS AN ENGINE OF DEATH.

AND *I'VE* GOT THIS PERFECT MIMICRY THING TO COUNTER ANYTHING HE MISSES.

MEANWHILE THIEF WAS LYING ABOUT HIS PANTS PROBLEM SO HE COULD RECONNOITER THE ENEMY WITHOUT RAISING SUSPICION.

YOU WERE DEAD, AND ON FIRE, AND A *HAT* WHEN THAT HAPPENED, HOW DO YOU KNOW?

IT'S ONE OF THE OLDEST TRICKS IN THE BOOK.

Illustrated guide to scatalogical tricks

IT'S A REALLY WEIRD BOOK.

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MISSION COMPLETE

EXCELLENT WORK, THIEF. REPORT

THIEF?

ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO DISCUSS MISSION SENSITIVE INFORMATION WITH NON-COMBAT PERSONNEL NEARBY?

OH, HIM? HE'S HARMLESS. GO AHEAD

SCREW YOU GUYS SIDEWAYS WITH A POLEAXE.

THAT'S NOT COMFORTABLE, SANITARY, OR POSSIBLE.

SHUT UP

I AM AS MUCH A PART OF THIS GODAWFUL TEAM AS ANY OF YOU JERKS.

I CAN VOUCH FOR HIM, IF YOU LIKE.

IT'S A START.

I WILL CHOKE THE LIFE OUT OF YOU JUST TO HEAR YOU BEG FOR A MERCY THAT WILL NOT COME

OH YEAH, *THAT'S* GOING TO HAPPEN.

JUST REPORT!

TURNS OUT THE DARK WARRIORS **AND** THE FIENDS WANT US DEAD

WHAT?

YEAH, I DON'T GET IT EITHER.

SOMETHING ABOUT REVENGE FOR ***RUINING*** THEIR LIVES FOREVER

OH, WE'VE RUINED MILLIONS OF LIVES.

THEY'RE JUST BEING BABIES ABOUT IT

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IT'S SIMPLE THIEF, YOU'LL STEAL THEIR RESOLVE

EASILY DONE.

FIGHTER, YOU'LL USE YOUR SWORDS TO HURT THEM.

THAT'S WHAT SWORDS ARE DESIGNED TO DO!

THAT'S... YES, FIGHTER GOOD

MEANWHILE, I'LL PLAY THE BACK FIELD AND TAKE CARE OF ANY HOLES IN OUR OFFENSE OR OUR DEFENSE.

THAT'S EVERYONE LET'S ROCK.

OH, COME ON.

YOU THREE ***KNOW*** I'M THE MOST POWERFUL ONE HERE

I'LL ***PROVE*** IT CHOOSE ONE OF THEM.

WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS, BM.

NO, YOU KNOW WHAT? FORGET IT ***I'LL*** CHOOSE AND I PICK ALL OF THEM.

BLACK MAGE, YOU CAN'T!

OH, YES. I ***CAN***

HEY, EVIL MONSTERS. IF YOU KILL YOURSELVES, THEN I WON'T HAVE TO DO WHAT I'M GOING TO DO.

I THINK WE'RE GONNA HAVE TO GO WITH A BIG "NO" ON THAT ONE

GOOD

OH, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

MAKE US LAUGH AT YOU SO HARD WE LOSE CONTROL OVER OUR **BOWELS** AND LEAVE IN COMPLETE DISGRACE?

HE'S BEEN READING THE BOOK!

NO

WHAT I'M GOING TO DO IS THIS

WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?

REMEMBER THE CASTLE OF ORDEALS?

AND HOW WE HAD TO DEFEAT OUR TRAGIC FLAWS TO BECOME HEROES OF LEGEND?

I DIDN'T DEFEAT MINE I DID THIS

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OKAY.

DOES ANYONE KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON?

BLACK MAGE IS DEFEATING SOME MONSTERS AND IT'S NOT ALARMING OR WEIRD!

OKAY BY "ANYONE" I REALLY MEANT "RED MAGE AND NEVER FIGHTER."

Y'KNOW WHEN I SAID I KNEW ALL THE MOVES IN THE GAME?

WELL, I DON'T KNOW WHAT *THAT* WAS

THAT WAS ME ABSORBING THE EVIL FROM SOME OF THE MOST EVIL THINGS ALIVE

YOU CAN *DO* THAT?

WELL LET'S SEE

I DID IT *TWICE* SO, YEAH I CAN

BUT WHY?

WHAT DID YOU *THINK* I MEANT EVERY TIME I SAID I WAS GOING TO BURN THE WORLD?

WHO CARES?

YEAH, YOU'RE A WEINER.

YOU COULDN'T BURN A MATCH.

YEAH WE...

YOUR FACE IS UGLY

SHUT UP!

OKAY, BUT WE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING.

YOU WERE THINKING T

PRETTY HARD.

OH, THAT'S VERY TRUE.

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ARE YOU GUYS SUPERCHARGED WITH THE STOLEN ESSENCES OF THE MOST EVIL THINGS IN THE WORLD (INCLUDING YOURSELF, SOMEHOW,) ARE YOU?

NO?

HEY, LOOK AT ALL THE CRAP I DON'T HAVE TO TAKE FROM YOU JERKS ANY MORE

YOU THINK WE'RE JERKS?

NO, I THINK YOU'RE ASSHOLES.

I WAS TRYING TO MAKE YOUR FINAL MOMENTS A LITTLE NICER JERK

FINAL MOMENTS, EH? WE OUTNUMBER YOU.

MAYBE, BUT I CAN DO ANYTHING

THAT CAN BE EXPRESSED BY GRATUITOUS USE OF EVIL BLACK ENERGY TENDRILS

LIKE THIS!

YOU ALREADY DID THAT

HRK...

THAT'S NEW THOUGH.

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WAIT MAYBE SHE'S OKAY.

OR MAYBE I'M WRONG.

WHITE MAGE 2

STAY AWAY FROM HER.

FIGHTER

STAY BACK

GET OUT OF THE WAY FIGHTER

NO.

OKAY YOU CAN'T ACTUALLY STOP ME

I'LL TRY

WHAT ARE WE DOING? THIS IS *INANE*

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS.

OF COURSE YOU DON'T

I M SAY.NG WE'RE FIGHTER AND *BLACK MAGE*! ARE WE REALLY GOING OUT ON A SUPER POWERED DUE.?

YOU CAN BLOCK *ANYTHING* AND I M BASICA..Y A GOD

OUR FIGHT WOULD RAZE THE [illegible] *AND* WE'D SOLVE NOTHING

SO FAR GONE YET THAT I DON T KNOW YOU RE ONLY TRYING TO HE.P WH.TE MAGE I I DIDN'T KNOW SHE D

TAKE HER AWAY FROM HERE FROM *ME*

FUNNY STORY I NOT CED YOU USE *SWORDS* TO BLOCK

GHKT

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AND JUST TO BE SURE

WATCH HER.

BUT--

GEE THE BACK STABBER STABBED ME IN THE BACK

OH, SHOCK AND ALARM

SO MY DESPERATE GAMBIT DIDN'T DO A DAMN THING?

WEeeeee, IT MADE ME TARGET YOU NEXT THAT'S SOMETHING.

MY ONLY REGRET IS THAT I DIDN'T HATE YOU *MORE*.

..AND EXIT

DON'T TELL ME YOU THINK YOU CAN FIGHT BACK RIGHT?

YEAH. I DO.

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IT'S NOT TOO LATE

IT IS FOR SOME PEOPLE

ARE YOU TRYING TO GOAD ME?

YOU KNOW IT'S GOING TO END HERE

JUST LIKE IT WAS ALWAYS GOING TO, RIGHT?

YOU'RE CATCHING ON.

ONE LAST THING DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN WE WENT TO GURGU?

YES.

WHY DID YOU DO IT LIKE THAT?

WE THOUGHT IT'D BE FUNNY

HEH THAT WAS FUNNY WASN'T IT

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I WON'T LET YOU DESTROY THE WORLD

THAT'S SUPER

I'M NOT GOING TO ASK WHO CAUSED THIS MESS BECAUSE I ALREADY KNEW THE ANSWER BEFORE I WOKE UP THIS CENTURY

I'LL DEAL WITH YOU IN A SECOND Y'OLD BASTARD

OR, MORE ACCURATELY, RIGHT NOW

WHAT?!

THAT'S IT, I'VE HAD ENOUGH.

THIS WHOLE GODDAMN ADVENTURE HAS BEEN NOTHING BUT POINTLESS BUILD UPS TOWARD PAY OFFS THAT NEVER HAPPEN

I'M DONE

IT'S BEEN REAL... SME... YA LATER

WHAT HAPPENED IS BOTH SATISFACTORY AND LOGICAL

GODDAMMIT

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ARGH! HOW DO YOU KEEP DOING THAT?

IT'S A SIMPLE RE-WRITE REALITY ACCORDING TO YOUR WHIM SPELL.

I SEE

THANK YOU FOR GIVING ME EXACTLY WHAT I NEEDED TO K..L YOU!

NO, I DIDN'T

NO, I DIDN'T, YOU MORON.

FFFF FFFFFF FF --

JACK ASS

AND I GUESS YOU GUYS ARE STI.. MAD ABOUT THAT KILLING YOU THING

IF YOU THINK ABOUT T I'M THE VICTIM HERE

HOW?

I DIDN T GET WHAT I WANTED

ARE WE DOING THIS END BATTLE NOW OR WHAT?

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WELL, I STARTED THE END BATTLE AND WAS DOING PRETTY DAMN GREAT AT IT, THANKS UNTIL YOU CAME IN AND JACK ASSED MY VICTIMS BACK TO LIFE

YOU THOUGHT THEY WERE THE END BOSS?

WHO ELSE WOULD BE?

YOU!

THE END BOSS IS ALWAYS THE MOST HIDEOUSLY EVIL THING IN THE WORLD! THAT'S YOU!

YOU EXIST TO CORRUPT! YOU ARE A BLIGHT UPON THE WORLD!

YOUR ONLY REDEMPTION WILL BE IN DEATH BECAUSE YOU WON'T BE AROUND TO DESTROY ALL THAT LIVES!

YOU ARE THE END BOSS!

WE ARE THE HEROES!

SARDA BROUGHT THEM BACK TO LIFE TO SO WE COULD DEFEAT YOU AND BRING BALANCE TO THE WORLD AT LAST!

WELL.

UM.

NO.

YOU'RE ALL SELFISH MONSTERS WHO NEED TO DIE FOR THE GOOD OF EVERYONE ELSE.

WAIT EVEN FIGHTER?

EXCEPT FIGHTER

YAY!

HE'S A CASUALTY

YAY!

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YOU LEAVE NOTHING BUT *DEATH* AND HORROR IN YOUR WAKE.

THAT'S NOT FAR SOMETIMES THERE'S FIRE

YOU ARE A *PLAGUE* UPON THIS LAND.

ONE THAT I HAVE WATCHED CLAIM LIFE AFTER LIFE STARTING WITH THE DEATH OF MY PARENTS.

DUN, DUN, *DUNNNNN.*

POINT OF ORDER

NAH-*UH!*

FURTHER-MORE THAT'S SUPER *IMPOSSIBLE* YOU'RE LIKE A MILLION YEARS OLD OR SOMETHING STUPID

BILLIONS.

BUT I STARTED AS THIS YOUNG MAN!

I DON'T KNOW WHO THAT IS.

ALL HUMANS LOOK ALIKE.

WHICH IS TO SAY *UGLY*

THAT IS A CHILD WHO *WATCHED YOU* SLAUGHTER HIS PARENTS.

GONNA HAVE TO BE MORE SPECIFIC.

AFTER YOU BROKE HIS MIND WITH A GLIMPSE INTO THE DREAD LATTICE OF BLACK MAGIC, YOU KILLED HIS FOSTER FAMILY

THEN HIS OTHER FOSTER FAMILY

THEN YOU DESTROYED HIS ORPHANAGE.

LIKE WAS THIS *RECENTLY?* LAST WEEK? A MONTH AGO?

HELP A GUY OUT, WILL YA

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WELL, IF THIS MAD QUEST FOR REVENGE AGAINST BLACK MAGE--

ALL OF YOU.

BUT HE'S THE ONE WHO DID IT!

WE'RE INNOCENT! LIKE LOVING FOSTER PARENTS.

BUT YOU DID NOTHING TO STOP HIM.

BUT WE DIDN'T ***HELP!***

SOMETIMES.

WAIT A SECOND

IF YOU HATE US SO MUCH. THEN ***WHY'D*** YOU GIVE US ***ALL THOSE*** QUESTS THAT JUST MADE US STRONGER THAN EVER?

ISN'T IT OBVIOUS?

NO, OF COURSE IT'S NOT. BECAUSE THIS IS WHERE I HAVE TO EXPLAIN IT TO YOU.

IT WASN'T ENOUGH FOR ME TO DESTROY YOU. IT WOULD BE TOO EASY BY WAY OF EXAMPLE...

SEE HOW EASY THAT WAS?

I'M PRETTY SURE IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO FEEL PAIN FROM EVERY DISTINCT PARTICLE OF MY BODY, BUT HERE WE ARE. ***WOW***

I MADE YOU WHAT YOU ARE TODAY SO YOU'D KNOW EXACTLY HOW ***INSIGNIFICANT*** YOU ARE WHEN ALL THAT POWER FAILS TO STOP ME FROM KILLING YOU.

THAT'S MESSED UP SARDA

OH? THE THOUGHT OF IT KEPT ME WARM FOR BI...ILIONS OF YEARS.

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A THOUGHT OCCURS VIS-A-VIS LOGICAL PARADOX! AND YOUR QUEST FOR REVENGE

HURRY, I'M ALREADY BORED FROM THE FIRST TIME I HEARD YOU SAY THIS.

IF YOU HATE US FOR RUINING

ALLEGEDLY

UH, FOR ALLEGEDLY RUINING YOUR LIFE, THEN WE'LL KILL THE YOUNGER YOU SO YOU NEVER GROW UP AND THIS NEVER HAPPENS!

YOU'RE NOT REALLY "UP" ON EXTRA-LINEAR THINKING, ARE YA, SPORT

THIS IS NOT HAPPENING ***MULTIPLE*** TIMES. IT'S A SINGLE EVENT TO WHICH I POSSESS MULTIPLE VANTAGES.

I ALREADY ***KNOW*** YOU DON'T KILL ME AS A CHILD BECAUSE I'M RIGHT HERE DOLT

AND, NO, DON'T SAY "BUT WHAT IF WE DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT"

YOU ***CAN'T*** DO SOMETHING YOU HAVEN'T YET DONE DIFFERENTLY THAN HOW IT WILL ***COME TO BE*** DONE.

THAT WAS THE MOST CONFUSING THING I'VE HEARD IN MY LIFE

TWO PLUS TWO IS FOUR

WAIT, WAIT, WAIT, WAIT

WAIT

HOW LONG DOES THIS GO ON, SARDA?

HE'S NEARLY DONE.

YOU CAN'T TRANSFORM NUMBERS INTO OTHER NUMBERS LIKE THAT

IT'D JUST GO ON ***FOREVER***

THAT'S LIKE WITCHCRAFT

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WWW.[illegible].COM

I DON'T GET IT.

YOU HATE US BECAUSE WE'RE ALLEGEDLY—

THANK YOU.

—EVIL MASS-MURDERING MONSTERS, BUT WE WOULDN'T HAVE DONE EVEN HALF THAT STUFF HAD YOU NOT SENT US ON QUESTS TO POWER US UP TO BETTER ENJOY KILLING US FOR BEING THE MASS-MURDERING MONSTERS YOU SENT US OUT TO BECOME

AND?

AND ISN'T IT THEN *YOUR* FAULT THAT ALL THE TRAGEDIES HAPPENED?

IT'S MY FAULT YOU PEOPLE KILL AND CHEAT YOUR WAY THROUGH YOUR MISERABLE LIVES?

KILLING AND CHEATING IS ALL WE'RE GOOD AT.

AND INFIGHTING

I'M SAYING YOU COULD HAVE STOPPED US!

NO ONE CAN UNMAKE THE PAST

SIMILARY, THE FUTURE ALREADY HAPPENED.

IT ALREADY HAPPENED, THERE'S NO "UNDO"

WE JUST HAVEN'T *REACHED IT* YET

OKAY I HAVE A THEORY

IT'S CALLED *I NEVER KNEW IT WAS POSSIBLE TO CARE LESS ABOUT TIME TRAVEL.*

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I DID IT I DID IT!

YEAH, BECAUSE I HAVEN'T ALREADY MENTIONED I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO DO.

GODDAMMIT

ARE YOU MADE OUT OF PLOTANIUM?

I TELE-PORTED MY YOUNGER SELF TO A WIZARD'S SCHOOL.

OVER A LIFETIME OF ARDUOUS STUDY, I WILL BECOME THE MOST POWERFUL MAGE IN HISTORY

I WILL THEN EXPEND ALL THAT POWER TO REACH THE BEGINNING OF THE UNIVERSE TO REMAKE IT IN MY IMAGE SO THAT YOU NEVER HAPPEN.

THAT DIDN'T WORK OUT

YOU'D BE AN ACTUAL THREAT IF YOU COULD EVER HIT ANYTHING WITH THAT ATTACK

Onrac

Where lightning can't strike thrice!

MOMMY? WHERE DO ANGELS COME FROM?

FROM THE LAUGHTER OF CHILDREN, OF COURSE

Onrac

Where lightning can't strike thrice!

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WE HAVE TO PUT ASIDE OUR HATRED AND OVERRIDING DESIRE TO DESTROY ONE ANOTHER AND WORK TOGETHER!

THAT'S EASY SUPPRESSING THAT STUFF IS THE ***ONLY*** WAY WE'VE GOTTEN THROUGH EVERY SINGLE DAY SINCE WE MET

BUT GUYS, WHAT ABOUT BLACK MAGE? HE'S ***ACTUALLY*** EVIL NOW, NOT JUST A MISUNDERSTOOD HELPER.

UH.

UH.

OH! SARDA WAS MIND CONTROLLING ME ER IT WAS THE MIND CONTROL

HM, THAT DOESN'T SEEM LOGICAL

MIND CONTROL NEVER DOES

SO, THIS IS WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE BORED TO DEATH.

HEY IT GOT US THIS FAR!

WAIT, THIS IS PERFECT THE OMNIPOTENT JACKASS JUST JACKED HIS OWN ASS.

CAN WE HAVE ***ANYONE*** ELSE SAY WHATEVER HE'S GOING TO SAY HM? ***PLEASE?***

NO, NO. WE COULDN'T BEAT ***OLD SARDA*** BECAUSE HE ALREADY KNEW WHAT WE'D DO AND HOW HE'D COUNTER IT WHEN HE SAW IT ALL GO DOWN AS ***YOUNG SARDA*** WHOM HE JUST TELEPORTED!

NOW THAT HE DOESN'T KNOW WHAT'S COMING, ***WE*** CAN JACK ***HIS*** ASS.

WE'LL JACK IT RIGHT OFF!

STOP TALKING.

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I STILL KNOW I WIN BECAUSE MY YOUNGER SELF WILL GROW UP IN A WORLD NO LONGER TERRORIZED BY YOU.

AND WHAT YOU FAIL TO REALIZE IS

UH

OKAY HE'S GOT A POINT

BECAUSE SOON AS WE'RE DONE HERE? MY PLAN WAS TO TERRORIZE THE WORLD BIG TIME

I WAS GOING TO PLUNDER THE DWARVEN LANDS AND USE THOSE RESOURCES TO SUBJUGATE EVERYONE ELSE

I WAS GOING TO USE MY INFINITE KNOWLEDGE TO DETHRONE THE GODS AND START THE WORLD OVER.

AND I WAS GOING TO OPEN UP A FREE HEROING SCHOOL AND TEACH EVERYONE HOW TO BE A HERO SO THERE'D BE NO MONSTERS OR OPPRESSION.

NONE OF THAT HAPPENS THEN?

NOPE.

AT LEAST I WILL DIE KNOWING THAT NONE OF YOU JERKS ACHIEVED ANY-THING

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY BRILLIANT CAREER, I HESITATE TO SAY THIS, BUT...

I HAVE A PLAN.

GOOD LUCK WITH THAT

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IT'S NOT A PLAN ANYONE WILL LIKE.

NOTHING YOU HAVE SAID OR DONE HAS EVER BEEN ANYTHING ANYONE HAS LIKED

YOU'LL LIKE THIS LESS.

BUT FIRST, UH SARDA!

WHAT IS THAT BEHIND YOU!

SURELY YOU MUST BE KIDDING.

NO! IT'S BEHIND YOU AND OH MAN YOU BETTER LOOK RIGHT NOW OR-OOH!

THIS IS YOUR IDEA OF A PLAN.

I'M GOING TO TURN AROUND AND, OH LOOK, THERE'S NOTHING THERE WHAT A "SURPRISE" THAT IS, GOSH.

AND THEN...

I KNEW THAT WOULD HAPPEN, BUT I'M MAD ABOUT IT ANYWAY

WHERE IN THE HELL ARE WE?

MY A-HOLE.

GODDAMM T RED MAGE

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SO DEEP ARE WE (WITHIN MY A-HOLE) THAT SARDA WILL ***NEVER*** FIND US NO MATTER HOW THOROUGHLY OR HOW VIGOROUSLY HE PROBES MY A-HOLE.

CAN YOU SAY TH-NGS W-THOUT ***TALKING?***

IS THAT

CAN WE ***DO*** THAT? PLEASE?

WHAT'S WRONG?

ALL I M SAYING IS THAT WE'RE DEEP, ***DEEP*** IN MY A-HOLE.

STOP USING THAT WORD!

O...KAY

THANK YOU

WOULD YOU PREFER ME TO SAY THAT WE ARE IN MY B-HOLE THEN?

EITHER IS ACCURATE

I M NOT SURE WHAT THAT COULD REFER TO, AND T MAKES ME WORRIED

OH, IT'S QUITE SIMPLE, REALLY

I PUT US BETWEEN TWO PORTABLE HOLES WHILE SARDA WASN'T LOOKING.

A-hole

B-hole

THE HOLES THEMSELVES THEN FELL INTO EACH OTHER, REMOVING EACH FROM THE UNIVERSE ENTIRELY

A-hole

B-hole

AND NOW THAT WE'RE OUTSIDE SARDA'S PURVIEW, I CAN DIVULGE MY GREATEST PLAN EVER!

SPIT IT OUT SO I CAN HATE T PROPERLY

I ABSORBED THE CONTENTS OF THE DATASPHERE. I KNOW HOW TO DESTROY EVERYTHING THAT WILL EXIST

THAT ***INCLUDES*** SARDA

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ELSEWHERE IN THE TEMPLE

IT'S QUIET.

YE THINK WE CAN STOP HIDING?

WE'D BETTER HIDE A LITTLE MORE TO BE *COMPLETELY* SURE

YAR. CAN WE BE DONE WITH THE HIDING YET? I BE GETTIN' THE LEG CRAMPS.

OH, WE MAY AS WELL.

WE'RE HIDING FROM AN OMNIPOTENT SUPER-WIZARD.

IF HE WANTS US DEAD, IT WON'T MATTER IF WE'RE HIDING FROM HIM.

I THANK YOU, MR. CLOUD-UP-AND-RAIN-ALL-OVER-US.

SORRY, I DIDN'T MEAN TO *INTERRUPT* THE HUG PARADE WITH A DOSE OF COLD, HARD REALITY.

AH! WE'RE *MISSING* THE HUG PARADE FOR THIS?

YAR, I BEEN THINKING IT WERE THE WEEK OF THE *NEXT* WEEK

GOSH, IF ONLY WE HAD A *NEWSLETTER*, THINGS LIKE THIS WOULDN'T HAPPEN!

YES, I'M BITTER.

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DID ANY-ONE ELSE NOTICE THE HUGE GLOWING MYSTICAL ORBS ON TOP OF OUR HIDING PILLARS?

NAY

NO.

YES

BUT NOT PRIOR TO YOU POINTING THEM OUT

DO THEY HAVE ANY SORT OF PRACTICAL PURPOSE?

YE MEAN BEYOND THEIR OBVIOUS USE WHAT BE THE HOLDING DOWN OF THESE HERE HIDEY PILLARS?

UH, YES. YES, BEYOND THAT.

WELL, THAT'S THE EARTH ORB. TO POSSESS IT IS TO POSSESS THE SOUL OF THE LAND.

IF I HAD TO GUESS, I'D SAY THOSE ARE THE OTHER ORBS, NAMELY WATER, WIND, AND FIRE.

IN SHORT, THIS ROOM APPEARS TO CONTAIN THE FOUR PRIMARY MECHANISMS THAT UH...

...CONTROL...

...EVERYTHING...

OH, THAT'S USEFUL.

AYE

USE

FUL

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IT WON'T BE EASY

NOTHING THAT INVOLVES ENDURING YOU JERKS FOR YET ANOTHER FIVE MINUTES IS EVER EASY

IT WILL REQUIRE TEAM WORK.

WE CAN DO THAT

IN THEORY

WE'VE *SEEN* TEAMWORK, ANYWAY

WELL, I'VE HEARD *OF* IT.

NOT SURE I UNDERSTAND THE APPEAL

LET ME PUT IT ANOTHER WAY

IF WE ARE TO LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO DESTROY EACH OTHER *PROPERLY*, WE HAVE TO TEAM UP TO DESTROY SARDA *FIRST*.

EHHHHH...

I GUESS.

OKAY. STEP *ONE*: KILL BLACK MAGE

POINT OF ORDER *WHAT THE HELL!*

WOULD YOU RATHER BE KILLED BY SARDA OR YOUR BELOVED FRIENDS?

NEITHER! ALSO, I HATE YOU GUYS

HATE IS A KIND OF LOVE.

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YOU WERE JUST TALKING ABOUT HOW WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER!

AND NOW WE'RE WORKING TOGETHER TO KILL YOU.

DAMMIT FIGHTER I JUST TRICKED YOU INTO BEING FRIENDS AGAIN.

I'M SORRY, I WASN'T PAYING ATTENTION AND THEN EVERYONE WAS ALL ACTION POSE!

WHAT'S UP?

THEY'RE TRYING TO KI... ME!

THAT'S A SHAME

BUT WE HAVE A GOOD REASON!

SORRY, BLACK MAGE, BUT YOU HEARD THE MAN.

"A GOOD REASON" ISN'T A GOOD REASON AT ALL!

WE NEED TO USE YOUR HEART

SO DO I!

IT MOVES MY BLOOD AROUND

NOT IF WE KILL YOU!

THAT'S DISTRESSINGLY LOGICAL

YOU'RE A NEXUS OF DESTRUCTIVE FORCE.

AND THAT'S BEEN AMPLIFIED BY THE HATE AND EVIL YOU ABSORBED FROM YOUR DOPPELGANGER AND THE FIENDS.

AT THE CENTER OF IT ALL IS YOUR HEART A MASS OF PURE MALEVOLENCE FOR ALL THAT LIVES.

I'VE ONLY BEEN SAYING THAT FOR YEARS NOW

UNLEASHING ITS POWER MAY BE ENOUGH TO DESTROY SARDA COMPLETELY.

SUDDENLY, LIVING IN YOUR A-HOLE FOREVER DOESN'T SEEM SO BAD

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I DON'T UNDERSTAND *WHY* THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME!

YOUR HEART, OR MORE *ACCURATELY* THE SEETHING BLACK MASS OF HATE WHERE YOUR HEART WOULD BE, IS THE MOST POWERFUL DESTRUCTIVE FORCE WE CAN ACCESS.

UNFORTUNATELY FOR YOU, IT'S LODGED IN YOUR CHEST.

PUT ME DOWN

WE LIVE IN A RIDICULOUS FANTASY PASTICHE! INVASIVE *INVOLUNTARY* SURGERY *CAN'T* BE THE ONLY POSSIBLE ANSWER!

WELL, NO. I GUESS NOT

IF YOU COULD SOMEHOW CHANNEL THOSE BLACK MAGICAL ENERGIES INTO A KIND OF ATTACK OR "BEAM", THAT WOULD WORK.

BUT YOU'D HAVE TO BE A WIZARD TO PULL THAT OFF, PAL.

FFFFFFF

I *AM* A WIZARD!

ARE YOU *SURE*?

IT'S IN MY GODDAMN *NAME*!

I THOUGHT YOUR CLASS CHANGE WAS CLOWN-RELATED THOUGH.

WHY DOES *EVERYONE* SAY THAT!

WHY DO YOU DRESS LIKE THAT AND EXPECT IT TO BE OTHERWISE?

FFFFFFF

I THINK HE SPRUNG A LEAK

FFFFFFF

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IT CAN'T BE AS *SIMPLE* AS SHOOTING SARDA IN THE FACE WITH SUPER-HATE.

OH, IT'S *NOT*, THIEF NOT BY A LONG SHOT

FIRST, I'LL USE MY ENLIGHTENED UNDERSTANDING OF ALL REALITY TO ATTACK SARDA WITH EVERY SPELL AT ONCE AND OVERWHELM HIS DEFENSES.

SARDA WILL ***UNDOUBTEDLY*** HAVE MANY COUNTERSPELLS AT THE READY

THEREFORE FIGHTER WILL HANG BACK WITH THE CASTERS TO *PARRY* WHATEVER IS SET OFF

THUS GIVING BLACK MAGE THE OPPORTUNITY TO GET A *SINGLE* SHOT OFF

UNLESS HE'S REALLY LYING ABOUT ***BEING*** A WIZARD

YOU'VE *SEEN ME CAST* SO MANY SPELLS ARGHBLE

OKAY, IF YOU INSIST. FINE, YOU'RE *TOTALLY* A WIZARD

I KNOW!

AND, FOR THE RECORD, YOU'RE ***STILL*** AGAINST THE PLAN WHERE WE KILL YOU AND TAKE YOUR HEART OUT CORRECT?

OH NO N RETROSPECT I REALLY THINK OF *COURSE I'M STILL AGAINST IT!*

WELL, IN THAT CASE: THIEF, YOU'LL NINJA YOUR WAY TO SARDA UNDER THE COVER OF APOCALYPTIC THAUMOLOGICAL FIREWORKS AND BACKSTAB HIS HEAD CLEAN OFF

I'M NOT 100% ON THE ANATOMY OF THAT, BUT I'LL MAKE IT WORK

AND NOW THAT I'VE DESCRIBED THE PLAN IN FULL, NOTHING CAN POSSIBLY GO WRONG.

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I HAVE A CONCERN ABOUT THE PLAN.

I AM OF AN OPEN MIND AND I AM WI...ING TO HEAR CRITICISM. ALSO: THAT'S STUPID AND YOU'RE STUPID

GO ON

WELL, IGNORING THE HIGHLY SUSPECT PART WHERE FIGHTER CAN BLOCK ETHEREAL ENERGY...

AND THE MORE SUSPECT PART WHERE ***YOU*** HAVE TO CAST EVERY SPELL AT ONCE..

AND THE GROSSLY SUSPECT PART WHERE I HAVE TO DODGE ***EXPLOSIONS*** WHILE I'M ***IN*** THEM...

THERE'S THE ***MOST*** SUSPECT PART OF ALL WHERE BLACK MAGE CAN HIT WHAT HE WANTS TO.

I GET EAGER

DOUBTING EVERY STEP OF THE PLAN IS NO REASON TO DOUBT THE PLAN ITSELF

NO, IT'S THE ***BEST REASON*** TO DOUBT IT

LOOK, SO MUCH CAN GO WRONG BEFORE THE THING YOU'RE MOST WORRIED ABOUT HAS A CHANCE TO GO WRONG THAT IT'S NOT EVEN WORTH WORRYING ABOUT, IS IT?

THAT'S... ***WHAT?***

SO, LET US FORGE AHEAD!

BUT

SORRY, CAN'T HEAR YOU OVER THE ***FORGING***, THIEF

HOW DO WE GET OUT OF HERE?

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WELL, I THINK IT'S PRETTY OBVIOUS WHAT WE MUST DO.

I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'RE DOING IT OUT OF A MISGUIDED SENSE OF HONOR OR PURE STUPIDITY--

--BUT A FREE-FOR-ALL BATTLE TO THE DEATH FOR THE ORBS IS A BAD IDEA WHEN ONLY ONE OF YOU IS A MASTER SWORDSMAN.

I WAS GOING TO SUGGEST THAT WE EACH TAKE ONE AND WORK TOGETHER ACTUALLY.

AH.

ELSEWHILE..

UH, IS HE GOING TO SAY ANYTHING?

HIS QUIET IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SOUND IN THE WORLD

DON'T RUIN THIS MAN.

IT IS KIND OF NICE

SO. LET'S JUST ENJOY THIS--

WHAT IF WE RUN OUT OF AIR!

WAIT, WAIT! ***HOW*** ARE WE BREATHING? AND ***WHAT*** ARE WE BREATHING?

I AM REALLY STARTING TO LIKE IT HERE

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OKAY I'VE GOT IT

WE JUST NEED TO MAKE TWO PORTABLE HOLES.

THAT'D BE DIFFICULT DUE TO THE TOTAL LACK OF MATERIALS BUT IT'S NOT *TECHNICALLY* IMPOSSIBLE

AND EACH ONE HAS TO BE THE SIZE OF THE UNIVERSE

WHAT?

THEN WE DROP THE UNIVERSE INTO ONE HOLE, AND DROP *THAT* HOLE INTO THE OTHER ONE, AND THEN REALITY WILL BE HERE!

SO YOU WANT US TO BUILD A THING THAT'S THE SIZE OF EVERYTHING USING NOTHING

YES.

YES.

TWICE

THAT IS QUITE LITERALLY THE LEAST PRACTICAL PLAN PUT TOGETHER BY AN *ALLEGEDLY* THINKING CREATURE

IT'S SO EASY TO CRITICIZE, ISN'T IT

CAN YOU THINK OF SOMETHING BETTER?

YES! BY DEFINITION *ANYTHING* I SAY WILL BE BETTER!

WHAT IF YOU SAY THREE OR MORE UNIVERSE-SIZED HOLES? HMMM?

I WON'T

WELL, GO ON, THEN.

LET'S HEAR *YOUR IDEA*, SMART GUY

ALL I CAN THINK OF IS THE DAMN THREE HOLE VERSION! ARGH!

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HOW DO WE SPLIT THEM UP THEN?

SIMPLE. I GET THE EARTH ORB BECAUSE OF THE WHOLE ELVEN THING.

BIKKE GETS THE WATER ORB.

AND YOU TWO GET THE ORBS THAT'RE SO THEMATICALLY APPROPRIATE TO EACH OF YOU THAT I DON'T NEED TO SPECIFY WHICH THEY ARE.

UH...SO, I GET... FIRE? BECAUSE I'M SUCH A MOTHEAD.

YEAH, SURE, WHY NOT.

AIR? WHAT AM I GOING TO DO WITH THE AIR ORB? I DON'T ACTUALLY BREATHE! IN CHARACTER

THESE THINGS ARE TIED TO METAPHORICAL APPLICATIONS AS WELL.

YOU'VE PROBABLY GOT INFLUENCE OVER KNOWLEDGE OR COMMUNICATION THERE.

MAYBE TRAVEL?

NOW, I BE THINKING TRAVEL BE UNDER THE PURVIEW OF THE ORB WHAT BE OF WATER

I'LL GRANT YOU TRADE AND COMMERCE, SO TRAVELS FOR THOSE PURPOSES WOULD QUALIFY AS WELL.

BUT NOT TRAVELING AS A WHOLE.

WELL, WE BE SEEIN' WHAT THE CLAW HAS TO SAY 'BOUT THAT!

NOTHING! IT'S A PROP AND IT'S STUPID!

YE DIDN'T HAVE TO YELL!

AND YOU SAID WE WOULDN'T NEED HIS TOTE.

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THERE. WE'VE ALL GOT ORBS AND WE'RE ALL HAPPY WITH THEM.

I'M NOT

AND NOBODY CARED.

EXCUSE ME.

SCRAM, Y'OLD BUZZARD. WE'VE GOT THE ORBS AND ALL THE LOOSELY DEFINED POWERS THEY CONFER.

THAT'S ADORABLE REALLY

OH, WE'LL SHOW YOU ADORABLE!

YES, YOU SURE DID

TRUST ME. INVERTING ALL OF REALITY INTO *THIS* NULL-ZONE IS THE BEST IDEA.

I HAVE TWO RELEVANT DEGREES.

ESCAPOLOGY AND WHAT'S THIS ESCAPONOMY?

YES.

IT'S IN *YOUR* HAND-WRITING

DOESN'T MEAN THEY'RE NOT DEGREES THOUGH!

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WE'VE GOT A WORLD TO CONQUER, SO GET LOST.

NO, THAT'S NOT GOING TO HAPPEN.

WHICH PART?

YES.

THAT'S IT, SMOKE 'IM!

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA *HOW TO USE* THE ORBS?

FWACK!!

YOU'RE A QUICK THINKER *AND* SPITEFUL. I CAN RESPECT THAT YOU WON'T BE KILLED, BIKKE

HOW ABOUT ME? SPITE IS ALL I HAVE TO KEEP ME GOING.

WELL, IT WON'T BE THAT WAY FOR MUCH LONGER.

THIS CONVERSATION IS STUPID AND I'M THROUGH WITH IT

WE'RE GOING TO GRAB THE NON-FABRIC OF THIS ANTI SPACE-TIME AND RIP IT A NEW ONE

IS THAT EVEN POSSIBLE? I'M NOT SURE THIS PLACE ACTUALLY EXISTS.

THEN THERE'S NO RULE THAT SAYS WE CAN'T

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OKAY, SO THE ORB GAMBIT DIDN'T EXACTLY WORK OUT.

THAT'S FINE.

WE'RE AN EVIL GANG, WE CAN JUST BEAT YOU UP.

AND I CAN DO THIS.

WHAT WAS THAT, WHAT WAS THAT?

I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT HAPPENED!

IT WOULD BE WORSE IF YOU DID

OKAY, WE NEED A NEW APPROACH.

YOU GUYS STAY HERE.

I'M GONNA GO LOOK FOR IT.

SO, WAS THAT A GOAT, OR...?

Y'KNOW, I'VE NEVER ASKED

AH-HA! I KNEW IT WOULD WORK.

ALL WE HAD TO DO WAS TURN RED MAGE'S A-HOLE INSIDE-OUT

AND EXPLAIN TO FIGHTER THAT YOU CAN'T DO THAT WITH SWORDS AND WHAT WE MEANT BY "RED MAGE'S A-HOLE"

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YOU'RE GONNA HATE IT WHEN DRIZZIL COMES BACK WITH THE PLAN TO DEFEAT YOU, WIZARD.

YEAH, HE'S NOT COMING BACK.

WHAT HE DID WAS TO RUN AWAY FROM THIS SITUATION.

BECAUSE HE QUITE WISELY RECKONED THE LONGER HE STAYED, THE LESS LIKELY HE WOULD BE ABLE TO LEAVE IT ALIVE.

WELL, IF YOU'RE RIGHT, THEN WHY DID HE LEAVE US HERE, HM?

I HAVE BEEN WITNESS TO THE INFINITE TAPESTRY OF THE COSMOS, BUT I HAVE NEVER MET ANY-ONE DUMBER THAN YOU GUYS.

LOOK, I DON'T DO THIS... UH, EVER

BUT YOU GUYS ARE BASICALLY LIKE KITTENS STUCK ON A LEAKING LIFEBOAT IN A TYPHOON

JUST RUN.

BUT, WHY?

FOUR REASONS.

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WE CAN'T PRACTICE.

WE WENT TO THE A-HOLEVERSE TO REVEAL MY PLAN OUTSIDE OF SARDA'S PURVIEW.

IF WE SHOW IT OFF ***NOW*** THE JIG WILL BE QUITE UP

OKAY. JUST GIVE ME THE VERY DETAILED STEP-BY-STEP THEN.

THAT'S EXACTLY THE THING WE DID THE ***OTHER*** THING TO AVOID WHAT WE'RE TRYING TO AVOI--

LOOK IT DOESN'T MATTER

WE'LL STAND HIM WHERE HE NEEDS TO BE FACE HIM THE RIGHT WAY AND INSTINCT'LL DO THE REST

AH, A HUGGING PLAN, IS IT?

GOOD ENOUGH.

THAT JUST LEAVES THE THIEF ISSUE THEN.

THE WAY I SEE IT IF WE KI-- HIM BEFORE HE DITCHES US OKAY YEAH ***WE'RE*** SCREWED BUT HE'S DEAD

YEAH, I CAN HEAR YOU.

SO ***ULTIMATELY*** WE'RE BETTER OFF

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Fighter's Journal

Day – WHATEVA

Oh man, what a day! We went outside the universe but it wasn't as interesting as it sounds. Everything is just kind of green and weird. Also, no air (because there is nothing except the green and you cannot breathe a color*)! So, I died. But then I forgot about the air and it was okay WHEW!

It turns out that we have to kill Sarda!!!! I don't think that's very heroic, but I guess it's so that he doesn't kill us first. And if we're dead, then we can't hero around, so it's like that. Also I think it works out to be okay because Sarda is kind of rude.

The plan to kill him is a secret SO SECRET that it's also a secret to my journal so your outta luck, Mr J (that is what I call my journal sometimes). But the short version is that I play the most critical role. that of man offensive hug machine.

Maybe that's too much information. I do not know, and I can't ask around because maybe that would be sharing too much info!!!

Just to be safe, pretend I didn't write that about the hugging.

And also pretend you didn't read it Okay? Good.

And don't go back and re-read it now that you're pretending you didn't read it because it's not there for you to read it because okay what?

Black Mage has been well. He's radiating pure darkness now. He's got some kind of screaming demon background noise reverb thing going on with his voice. I think he just wants attention.

Okay, gotta go and practice my hugging!

*Fighter Fact

FINE
IF YOU'RE GOING TO BE A BUNCH OF TEAM-KILLING **BABIES** ABOUT IT, I'LL STICK TO THE PLAN.

GREAT!

AS FAR AS YOU KNOW

I HEARD THAT!

I M SORRY
IT'S AN ELFISH THING. WHISPERING TREACHEROUS OMENS IS BASICALLY OUR **ACCENT.**

I COMPLETELY, SERIOUSLY INTEND TO DO MY PART

TO KILL YOU ALL.

OH, BLACK MAGE STOP **GAWKING.**

IT'S JUST A SPEECH IMPEDIMENT, NOT A **SECOND HEAD** GROWING OUT OF HIS NECK.

TELLING **THE TRUTH** ISN'T A SPEECH IMPEDIMENT RED MAGE

BUT IT KIND OF **IS** WITH US.

OKAY YEAH **BUT** THAT'S NOT THE POINT!

HE'S SAYING **ONE** THING AND THEN SAYING **ANOTHER** THING AND THEN HE DOES UH ONE OF THE

WAIT

CARRY THE SIX

OF THE THINGS HE SAYS ONE OF WHICH WE'RE SUPPOSED TO IGNORE IT'S THE THING HE DOES

THAT WAS VERY NEARLY A SENTENCE

FIGHTER'S RIFFING OFF ME NOW?

HOW DID THIS BECOME MY LIFE?

IS THIS LIKE PRISON? DO I HAVE TO SHANK A GUY TO GET CRED?

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THAT'S ENOUGH BOOBERY FOR NOW WE'VE GOT A MEGA-WIZARD TO KILL.

WE CAN DO THIS, GUYS. ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS KEEP OUR FOCUS.

HE-H BOOB

AHHHH!

I MEAN... EVERYTHING IS FIIINE.

IS IT?

YES. EXTREMELY, VERY, QUITE FINE.

HIS STORY CHECKS OUT

LET US PROCEED CASUALLY WITH OUR GUARDS LOWERED!

AHHH!

CRAZY WIZARD!

KILL US ALL!

THEY'RE PROBABLY TALKING ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE.

CHANGE OF TOPIC!

I HAVE TO FOLLOW THEM.

FORWARD AND ONWARD TO COMPLETE SAFETY!

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THERE HE IS!

HE MUST BE DISTRACTED DUE TO SIPHONING ENERGY FROM THE ORBS. STRIKE HIM DOWN WHILE HE'S WEAK!

I HAVE A SUPER DIMENSIONAL BRAIN, BLINKING WOULD BE A GREATER DISTRACTION TO ME.

ALSO, I BECOME MORE POWERFUL WITH EACH PASSING MOMENT

AH-HA!

TECHNICALLY EVERY MOMENT LEAVES YOU ***WEAKER*** THAN THE NEXT SO AT EVERY ***PRESENT*** MOMENT, YOU'RE WEAKER THAN YOU'LL EVER BE FOR THE ***REST OF YOUR LIFE!***

THE TIME TO STRIKE IS ***NOW!***

...NOW!

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WAIT, YOUR BALLS SHRUNK.

ORBS.

THEY'RE ORBS.

ORBS, BALLS, WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE? IT'S ALL SPHERES.

ANYWAY! THEY'RE NOT SHRINKING. I'M SIPHONING OUT THEIR POWER, REDIRECTING IT, RE-MAKING THE WORLD, ETCETERA, MY IMAGE, ETCETERA.

NO YOU'RE NOT!

YES, I AM.

YOU DIDN'T LET ME FINISH.

GO ON THEN.

OBVIOUSLY YOU'RE DOING THAT, BUT WHAT I'M SAYING IS WE'LL STOP YOU NOW THAT WE'RE HERE.

YOU AND WHAT RAGTAG BAND OF ADVENTURERS WITH HUMOROUSLY CONFLICTING PERSONALITIES WHO LEARN THE TRUE MEANING OF FRIENDSHIP?

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THERE'S NO SHAME IN RUNNING LIKE COWARDS.

NOT AT ALL! RUNNING LIKE COWARDS IS CHOOSING LIFE OVER DEATH. IT'S PROBABLY THE BRAVEST THING WE CAN DO RIGHT NOW.

WHY IS THE CEILING BLURRY?

IT'S NOT *YOU* ARE

I *TOLD* YOU WE SHOULD HAVE TAKEN THE STAIRS

ALL THESE TEMPLES HAVE STUPID HYPER-GEOMETRY

UM.

TO THE STAIRS!

LET'S GO *UP* THIS TIME

WHY DO WE EVEN *HAVE* PHYSICS?

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SEE, I DON'T THINK I'M BLURRY, BECAUSE THEN WHY WOULD THAT MAKE ME PERCIEVE **PARTS** OF THE WORLD AS BLURRY?

BUT NOW NOTHING'S BLURRY OR MAYBE **EVERY-THING** IS!

WILL YOU SHUT **UP!**

CAN'T YOU SEE WE'RE ULTRADOOMED, FIGHTER?

WELL, I CAN SEE THE CEILING.

GUYS!

STOP BEING STUPID FOR ONE SECOND AND DO THE THINGS WE TALKED ABOUT DOING!

HEY, YOU LET ME KNOW WHEN THE FIREWORKS START SO I CAN KILL YOU WITH A THOUGHT

UGH! GUYS, WE'RE LOOKING LIKE IDIOTS IN FRONT OF THE END BOSS.

I DON'T WANT TO PLAY THE BLAME GAME, BUT IF I DID, I'D SAY YOU THREE WERE 100% AT FAULT

DON'T LOOK AT **ME** I DO MY THING AT THE END

AND I FORGOT MY THING.

DON'T YOU GO FIRST ANYWAY?

ER, **NO!** SHUT UP! I'M GOING!

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Y'KNOW, I CAN READ THE EBB AND FLOW OF MAGIC LIKE IT'S A LARGE PRINT BOOK.

DON'T GET ME WRONG.

CASTING EVERY SPELL KNOWN AT ME IN WHAT IS PROBABLY AN ATTEMPT TO *OVERWHELM* MY DEFENSES *IS* A GOOD IDEA. BUT IT WON'T WORK

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO.

IT'S JUST A DISTRACTION.

FROM?

ME!

KI-BOOM!!

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WAS THAT ME? IT WAS ALL A BLUR AFTER AND DURING THE HUGE EXPLOSION.

MAYBE? I BACKSTABBED SOMEONE IN THE MIDDLE OF IT, I KNOW THAT.

HEY, YOU'RE NOT SUPER EVIL ANY MORE

WHAT'RE YOU--AWW, WHAT?!

NO ONE CARES.

DID THE PLAN WORK?

NO ONE COULD'VE SURVIVED THAT, THIEF

POINT OF ORDER: US.

WE'RE STATISTICAL OUTLIERS ON THE SURVIVABILITY CURVE

IT'S FOUR FOR FOUR! THAT'S 100%! HOW IS THAT AN OUTLIER?

THAT THE SURVIVAL RATE IS TECHNICALLY 100% IS WHAT'S SO UNLIKELY EVERYONE ELSE MUST HAVE BEEN KILLED, I.E. SARDA.

ON THE OTHER HAND THE ABERRANT NATURE OF OUR SURVIVAL MAY BE MORE ACCURATELY UNDERSTOOD AS A WHOLLY TEMPORARY CONDITION OF OUR DIRECTION.

I SUDDENLY FAVOR THE FIRST, MUCH MORE STUPID INTERPRETATION.

IF WE CAN JUST DODGE THE GROUND, WE'LL BE FINE.

LET US KNOW HOW THAT WORKS OUT FOR YA.

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I KNOW HOW WE CAN SURVIVE!

DON'T TELL ME.

YOU WANT US TO FLIP UPSIDE-DOWN BECAUSE YOU THINK THE EARTH WILL FLIP WITH US AND WE'LL GENTLY TOUCH DOWN AT THE "APEX" OF OUR "FALL"

NO, WE--

--MIME LIKE WE'RE ***WALKING*** DOWNSTAIRS UNTIL WE REACH THE ***GROUND*** FLOOR?

NO, ALL WE HAVE TO--

--DO IS HOLD OUR BREATH AND ***FLOAT*** TO THE GROUND LIKE FOUR BALLOONS?

THAT'S GOOD, BUT NO. ME AND THIEF HOLD ON TO YOU AND RED MAGE, AND THEN YOU GUYS CAST FEATHER FALL!

WAIT THAT'S NOT STUPID

BRILLIANT, IN FACT.

THERE'S A PROBLEM, BUT IT'S AN ***EASY*** FIX.

YOU'LL HAVE TO DOUBLE CAST IT ON YOURSELF, BLACK MAGE.

I USED UP ALL MY SPELLS BACK THERE.

YEAH, ***ABOUT*** THAT

REMEMBER BACK WHEN I HAD THOSE WONDERFUL TENDRILS MADE OUT OF EVIL?

AND HOW THEY COULD DO ANYTHING?

MAYBE YOU COULD UNDERSTAND WHY ONE WOULD DUMP ALL NON-APOCALYPTIC SPELLS GIVEN THAT ADVANTAGE

EH HEH?

GODDAMMIT, BLACK MAGE

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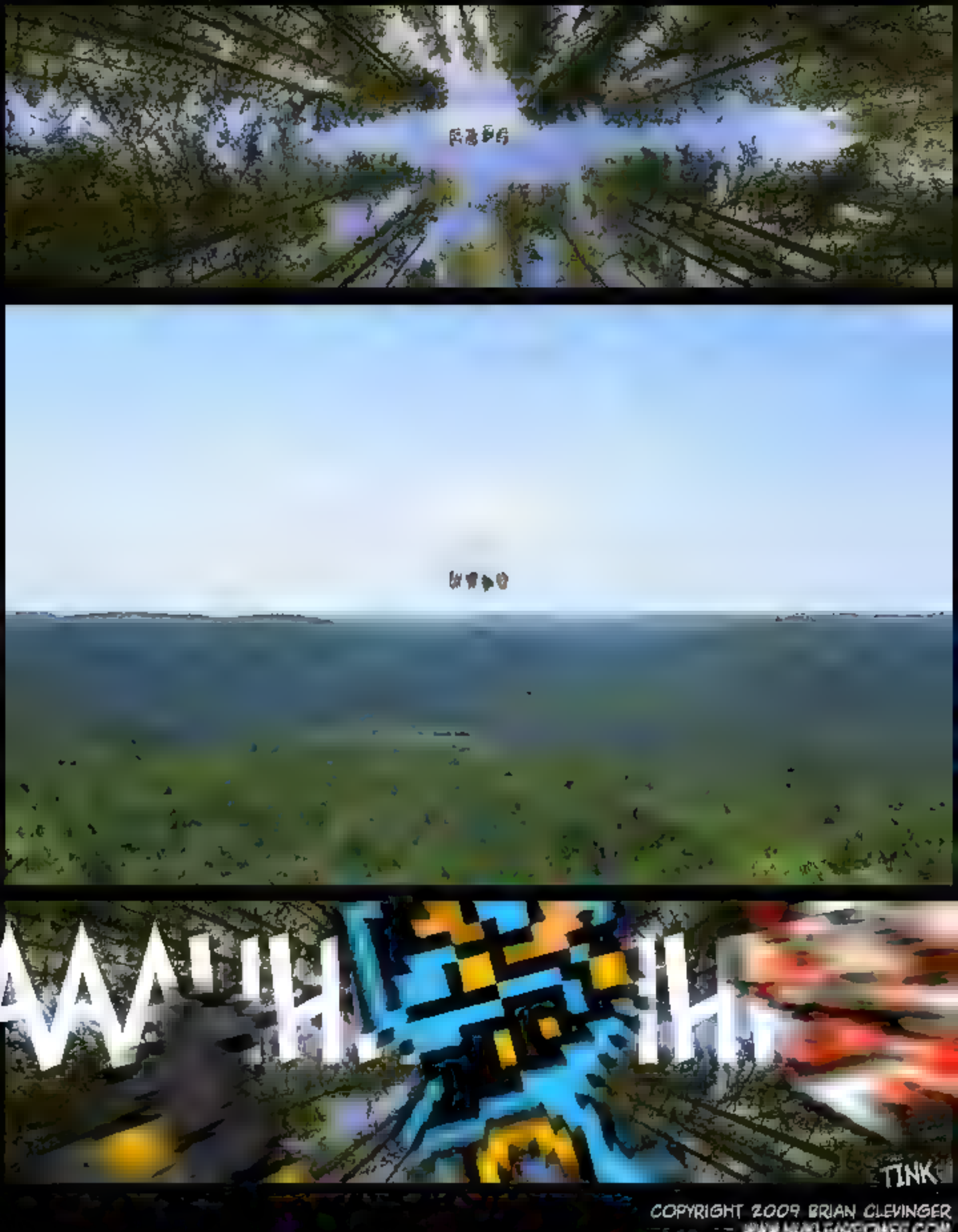

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THE WAY I FIGURE IT, THE *FALL* DOESN'T KILL YOU

THE *GROUND* DOES.

SO, I BLOCKED IT.

YOU BLOCKED THE EARTH.

WHY NOT? I CAN BLOCK MAGIC AND FIRE AND ALL KINDS OF STUFF.

I HATE IT WHEN THE THINGS HE SAYS THAT *DON'T* MAKE SENSE *MAKE* SENSE.

WELL, THE *IMPORTANT* THING IS THAT WE'RE SAFE FOREVER.

AGAIN.

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I KNOW WE'VE GOT THIS WHOLE **MURDER PACT** THING GOING, BUT IT MAY BE MORE PRACTICAL FOR US TO DIVIDE THE WORLD INTO QUADRA-SPHERES

EXPLAIN.

WELL, IF WE FIGHT ONE **ANOTHER** TO THE DEATH, THERE'S A **GOOD**—

OH, **DARN** IT

WOW, ONE OF RED MAGE'S COMPLEX PLANS DIDN'T WORK.

WERE **YOU** SURPRISED?

I WAS SURPRISED

I DON'T KNOW WHAT COULD HAVE GONE WRONG. THE DATASPHERE SHOWED ME EXACTLY HOW TO KILL SARDA!

AND YOU M.GHT HAVE DONE T HAD I NOT TAKEN THE POWER OF THE ORBS

AH.

THAT'S A DIFFERENT THING.

OKAY, WHAT CAN WE DO?

TWO THINGS.

ONE. HOPE SARDA HAD AN INEXPLICABLE CHANGE OF HEART AND HE WANTS TO BE OUR BESTEST EVER FRIEND.

NOT A PRAYER.

IN FACT I DION T THINK T WAS POSS B.E BUT NOW I HATE YOU EVEN MORE.

THE SUPER POWERED EVIL I ABSORBED FROM BLACK MAGE SEEMS TO BE RESPONS BLE

WHO **KNOWS** WHAT KIND OF SADISTIC AND MPOSS.BLE STUFF I... DO NOW

TWO. KISS OUR OWN ASSES **GOOD-BYE.**

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I WAS GOING TO GIVE YOU THE *ILLUSION* OF A FIGHTING CHANCE

BUT NOW I'D *RATHER* YOUR FINAL MOMENTS WERE ONES OF COMPLETE *DESPAIR*

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED, SARDA.

I HAVEN'T DONE IT YET

OH.

FUCK.

LOOK AT THE BRIGHT SIDE, BLACK MAGE.

YOU CAN DIE IN PEACE NOW THAT SARDA ABSORBED ALL OF YOUR EVIL.

MOST OF YOUR EVIL.

SOME OF YOUR--

AH'LL THUD UB BOW

THE IRONY IS THAT THERE'S NOT MUCH LEFT FOR ME TO DO TO YOU THAT YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY DONE TO YOURSELVES

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I'M STILL CONFUSED ON HOW WE GOT SO ***COMPLETELY*** SCREWED

THERE WAS A MINOR SNAFU WITH MY PERFECT PLAN TO KILL SARDA.

WE DID THE PLAN FINE

IT WAS ***SURGICAL*** PRECISION, REALLY

BUT WE WEREN'T FIGHTING SARDA. WE WERE FIGHTING SARDA HEPPED UP ON THE ORBS.

INSTEAD OF ***ANNIHILATING*** HIM WITH BLACK MAGE'S SUPER EVIL, IT UH...MADE HIM MORE POWERFUL THAN EVER.

MY BAD.

OKAY WELL, HOW DO WE KILL SUPER DOUBLE EVIL SARDA?

UH.

BY ALL MEANS GO AHEAD

THE DATASPHERE HAD INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO DESTROY EVERYTHING THAT EXISTS AND EVERYTHING THAT ***DOESN'T*** EXIST

HOWEVER, ON THE SUBJECT OF THINGS THAT ***COULDN'T*** EXIST, IT WAS NOTABLY SILENT

WHATEVER SARDA IS NOW, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE.

PFF, WHAT COULD HE ***POSSIBLY*** DO?

OH, PLEASE DON'T SAY THAT OUT LOUD

NO, THINK ABOUT WHAT HE SAID

WE'RE LIGHT WARRIORS, DAMMIT

I BET HE ***CAN'T*** HURT US ANY WORSE THAN WE HURT EACH OTHER EVERY DAY

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THIEF KINDA HAS A POINT

WE'RE OUR OWN WORST ENEMIES.

WHAT CAN HE DO?!

POIT!

WHAT IF I SAID IT WAS A RHETORICAL QUESTION?

THAT WORKED OUT OKAY.

SHUNK

WELL. I DESERVE THIS.

WHAT YOU DESERVE IS SO MUCH WORSE.

SO, LET'S GET CRACKIN', SHALL WE?

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WELL, SARDA, YOU *DID* IT

YOU BUILT US UP, MADE US INTO WARRIORS OF LEGEND

BUT NOW?

WE'RE *DEMORALIZED*, DE-LEVELED, AND DEFEATED

AND IT WAS ALL YOU.

YES, YOUR VICTORY OVER US IS SO VAST, SO *COMPLETE* THAT KILLING US WOULD BE A WASTE OF TIME

LETTING US LIVE OUT OUR NATURAL LIVES IN THE LOWLY STATE WE NOW FIND OURSELVES IN WOULD BE THE ULTIMATE FORM OF REVENGE.

YESSIR. LONG LIVES OF MISERY

NOW *THAT'S* A REVENGE WORTH WAITING BILLIONS OF YEARS TO EXACT

YUP

I DUNNO. SEEMS TO *ME* YOU WAIT THAT LONG, YOU WANT TO SEE SOME BLOOD

ISN'T THAT RIGHT, GUYS?

AHAHAHA!

SHUT *UP*

AHAHAHA!

BUT YOU *MYSELF*

AHAHAHA!

HE'S JOKING, OF COURSE.

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AS IT SO HAPPENS I AGREE

WAIT, SERIOUSLY?

MHMM

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU FELL FOR THAT!

DID YOU SEE THAT?

I TRICKED SARDA! LIKE, HARDCORE

I MADE THE OMNIPOTENT SUPER-WIZARD WHO HATES US LOOK LIKE A MORON!

THIS COULD ONLY BE BETTER IF I GOT H.M TO SAY HE SMELLS..

LET'S MAYBE PLAY DOWN THE MORON ANGLE, BLACK MAGE.

HM?

OH.

RIGHT HE CAN HEAR THINGS.

YOU TRICKED NO ONE

OH I WANTED TO K... YOU FOR THE FIRST B...ION B...ION AND A HALF YEARS BUT THEN

IT JUST WASN'T ENOUGH ANYMORE

BESIDES. K...LING YOU STARTED TO LOSE ITS NOVELTY AFTER THE FIRST FEW TIMES

SEE? I BARELY CRACKED A SMILE OVER THAT ONE

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I WISH HE'D STOP MAKING **INCREDIBLY PAINFUL** POINTS WITH OUR CORPSES.

OH I'M DONE WITH YOU FOR NOW, ANY-WAY

WE'RE FREE?

YES.

YOU'RE FREE TO LIVE

THAT'S UNT, I GET KINDA BORED AND MAYBE TURN YOU INTO AN INERT GAS.

OR DESTROY YOU SO UTTERLY THAT EVEN THE IDEA OF YOU IS ERRADICATED FOREVER

OR I DUNNO. MAYBE TURN OFF YOUR LUNGS EVERY SO OFTEN

Y'KNOW ENDLESS, RANDOM MAGICAL TORTURE ETCETERA

SO, WE ARE FREE TO LIVE LIVES OF AIMLESS DREAD FROM WHICH WE'LL NEVER ESCAPE?

WHERE ANY MOMENT MAY BE FILLED WITH A THOUSAND HORRID AGONIES?

WHERE WE ARE DOOMED TO FOREVER SUFFER FOR OUR MANY SINS?

YUP GO LIVE LIKE CRAZY

ANY FATE WE CAN WALK INTO BECAUSE WE'RE NOT DEAD IS A BETTER ONE THAN WE HAD TEN MINUTES AGO.

UNRELATED:

ANYONE ELSE HEAR THAT?

RRUMMBLE

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MAYBE HE'S GETTING READY TO THROW A PARTY FOR US.

HOW MANY PARTIES HAVE YOU BEEN TO THAT START WITH SOMEONE RUMBLING INTERNALLY MOMENTS AFTER ABSORBING LIMITLESS EVIL ***AND*** THE FULL MAGICAL POWER OF THE ELEMENTS THAT BIND THIS WORLD?

MAYBE ***THIS*** ONE DOES.

REALLY? THAT SOUNDS ***REASONABLE*** TO YOU?

SHOULD IT NOT?

I DON'T GO TO MANY PARTIES.

IS IT RUDE TO ***TRANSFORM*** WITHOUT SERVING DRINKS FIRST?

OH, I BET IT'S JUST HIS ALLERGIES.

IT'S NOT ALLERGIES! IT'S NEVER BEEN HIS ALLERGIES!

IF HE WAS EVER ALLERGIC TO ANYTHING, HE PROBABLY DESTROYED WHATEVER IT WAS BACK WHEN THE WORLD WAS FORMING AROUND H.M.

WAIT, HOW DOES ***THAT*** WORK WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE UNALTERABLE TIMELINE THAT HE ESPOUSES?

LOSING FOCUS!

WE WERE JUST GIVEN OUR, LIKE, ***EIGHTH*** LEASE ON LIFE, I'M NOT GOING TO BE TAKEN OUT BY AN EXPLODING SARDA.

CURRENT EVIDENCE SUGGESTS OTHERWISE

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DO WE HAVE ANY IDEA *WHAT* IS GOING TO KILL US THIS TIME?

MY GUESS? HE'LL ERUPT INTO A BRILLIANT COLUMN OF LIGHT THAT'LL REDISTRIBUTE THE ELEMENTAL, MAGICAL, AND EVIL ENERGIES HE ABSORBED

WE'LL BE RELATIVELY SAFE

HOW RELATIVELY?

SLIGHTLY TO NOT-AT-ALL. WE'LL BE LUCKY TO HAVE ANY SKIN LEFT

THIS TH.S .SN'T RIGHT

THANKS FOR THE UPDATE, SPANKY

THIS W.LL NOT BE

DAMMIT, HOW WAS HE ABLE--

I AM SARDA

AND I AM OLDER THAN TIME I POSSESS A POWER ***BEYOND*** MORTAL IMAGINATION

MY PLANS WILL NOT BE UNDONE BY SUCH AMATEUR-HOUR HORSESH T AS ABSORB.NG TOO MUCH POWER AND EXPLODING

I AM SARDA. MY WIL. BE DONE

I GUESS HE ***HAS*** GIVEN THIS A FEW ***BILLION*** YEARS MORE THOUGHT THAN WE HAVE

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TECHNICALLY, WHEN I SAY SARDA IS HERE, I MEAN JUST HIS BODY, WHICH HAS BECOME A PORTAL INTO THIS WORLD FOR ME.

GRAAH!

I GOTTA BE HONEST. MY HOPE WAS THAT THIS WHOLE CHAOS *THING* WAS GOING TO TURN OUT TO BE LIKE A METAPHOR.

ARE YOU KIDDING?

THIS IS GREAT FOR US!

OR JUST ME AND *NOT* YOU GUYS.

WHICH IS EVEN BETTER, REALLY!

LOYAL SERVANT OF CHAOS *BLACK MAGE*, REPORTING FOR DUTY, OH GREAT LORD OF EVIL.

MAY I SUGGEST MY FIRST ACT BE TO HERALD YOUR EMERGENCE IN THIS DOOMED WORLD WITH THE SLAUGHTER OF THESE THREE JERKS?

JUST USE MY SUPERGOD POWERS TO LOCK THE SOULS OF ALL LIVING THINGS ON THIS PLANE IN THE ETERNAL TORMENT OF THE DARKNESS BETWEEN

DOES THAT INCLUDE ME?

BIG TIME.

PRETTY SURE WE *HAVE* TO KILL CHAOS GUYS.

IT'S GOOD TO HAVE YOU ON THE TEAM.

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CAN YOU GIVE US A MOMENT?

I AM THE DAWNING CHAOS. FROM BEFORE THE BEFORE, THE DARKNESS AFTER THE END OF ALL THINGS. I AM NOTHING AND NO THING IS ETERNAL.

OKAY.

DID THAT ANSWER MY QUESTION?

I AM IRRELEVANT. TAKE AS MUCH OF IT AS YOU LIKE. ALL THINGS RETURN TO CHAOS, IN THE END.

WE'RE COOL.

THERE'S ONE SMALL BUT ALSO HUGE PROBLEM VIS A VIS, US DOING THE KILLING OF CHAOS.

NAMELY: SARDA DE-LEVELED US, BUT WE DON'T KNOW HOW MANY LEVELS WE LOST

I AM WILLING TO ENTERTAIN YOUR IDIOTIC NOTION OF HOW REALITY WORKS IF IT'LL GET YOU TO THE POINT FASTER.

IN LAYMAN'S TERMS, WE KNOW WE LOST THE FANCY ABILITIES THAT CAME WITH OUR CLASS CHANGES, BUT WE DON'T KNOW WHAT ELSE WE'VE LOST

WELL, *CAST* SOMETHING!

WHAT WAS THAT?

THE SOUND OF US DYING IN ONE ROUND

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OH, PLEASE I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF RED MAGE'S ***BLATHERING*** ABOUT LEVELS AND CLASSES AND SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES AND STATS.

WE'RE THE SAME GANG OF AMORAL JERKS WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN.

OBSERVE AS I DO A FANCY NINJA FLIP AND EVADE THIS WHOLE CHAOS [illegible].

DID YOU JUST TRIP OVER YOUR ***OWN*** ELF BOOTIES?

NO! I COULDN'T HAVE.

IT UM, THERE WAS A ROCK! A ***VINE*** A PREHENSILE DOUBLE-ENTANGLER [illegible].

LET'S JUST DO WHAT WE ALWAYS DO: STAND BEHIND FIGHTER WHILE HE MAKES THINGS DIE

YEAH, YOU CAN'T DE-LEVEL SWORDSMANSHIP OUT OF HIM.

HE'S WAY TOO DUMB TO FORGET IT

WHY I HURT?

MAYBE THERE'S A SIDE TO THIS WE HAVEN'T CONSIDERED YET

MAYBE ETERNAL TORMENT IS ***FUN.***

THAT'S YOUR ALTERNATIVE?

THAT'S ALL WE HAVE LEFT

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HERE'S SOMETHING WE HAVEN'T CONSIDERED. MAYBE CHAOS IS A WUSS.

EXPLAIN!

HE'S A WEIRD HEAD THAT SPROUT OUT OF SARDA'S FACE.

IT'S CREEPY, NO QUESTION, BUT IT DOESN'T *REALLY* FILL ME WITH THE DREAD OF THE ENDLESS ABYSS, OR WHATEVER.

MAYBE THIS IS JUST, I DON'T KNOW, A *LARVAL PHASE* FOR HIM.

SO, WE *MIGHT* HAVE A CHANCE TO STOP HIM FROM UNMAKING ALL LIFE!

BUT HOW CAN WE KNOW?

I COULD ASK.

REALLY?

I'VE NEVER SAID I'D ANSWER.

OR THAT MY ANSWER WOULDN'T BE TO KILL YOU IN AN INSTANT.

JUST ONCE I'D LIKE FOR OUR VILLAINS *NOT* TO BE HUGE JERKS ABOUT KILLING US.

THE UNIVERSE IS FILLED WITH BIG BABIES LIKE YOU. I'M DOING IT A FAVOR.

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WAIT A SECOND!

WE'VE NOTHING TO FEAR!

IS IT BECAUSE WE'RE SO BEYOND SCREWED THAT FEARING IT IS A WASTE OF OUR DOOMED TIME?

NO, IT'S BECAUSE CHAOS ALREADY LOST!

UH, IS THIS BASED ON THE EXACT OPPOSITE OF ALL AVAILABLE EVIDENCE?

NO. IT'S BASED ON THE *OPPOSITE* OF THAT.

WE KNOW CHAOS CAN'T WIN BECAUSE IT WOULD END EVERYTHING. GET IT?!

YES. THAT'S THE THING THAT WILL KILL US.

WELCOME TO FIVE MINUTES AGO.

NO, NO. SEE, THERE'D BE NO FUTURE, SO KID SARDA WON'T GROW UP INTO *JACKASS* SARDA AND GO BACK IN TIME WHERE HE (AND WE) ACCIDENTALLY BRING CHAOS INTO REALITY TO DESTROY IT.

OKAY, AND?

AND WE KNOW HOW THE FUTURE HAPPENS BECAUSE WE KNOW HOW THE *PAST* HAPPENED, SO WE ALREADY KNOW CHAOS DOESN'T WIN!

OH, GOD, I BETTER NOT CREATE A TEMPORAL PARADOX!

THAT'D BE TERRIBLE.

I WOULD *HATE* IT IF EVERYTHING WAS DESTROYED EXACTLY THE WAY I WANT TO DESTROY EVERYTHING.

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I'VE GOT IT

I'VE HAD IT WITH YOU, AND TALKING. SHUT UP.

I CAN FIX ALL OF THIS.

OHHH, NO YOU DON'T.

IF I HAVE TO LISTEN TO ONE MORE OF YOUR WORD SALADS IN THE GUISE OF A PLAN, I WILL KILL MYSELF SO HARD IT WILL KILL YOU INSTEAD.

NO, NO, NO. THIS IS SO STUPID IT'S COMPLETELY FOOLPROOF

THAT'S NOT HOW STUPID WORKS!

THERE'S A CRITICAL MASS OF STUPIDITY BEYOND WHICH NO ADDITIONAL AMOUNT OF STUPID WILL IMPROVE YOUR CHANCES FOR SUCCESS!

WHERE'D HE GO?

..WHICH I FIGURE IS FINE SINCE TIME IS MEANINGLESS TO YOU.

[illegible] MAY DO THIS THING.

SCORE.

[illegible] AS LONG AS YOU LIKE.

[illegible] TAKES NO MORE THAN 5% OF YOUR EARTH HOURS.

BUT YOU SAID—

[illegible] CHAOS!

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WHAT DID YOU DO?

I BOUGHT US SOME TIME. IT JUST WORKED OUT TO BE SLIGHTLY LESS TIME THAN I HAD HOPED

THE IDEA WAS THAT WE COULD DELAY THE FINAL BATTLE UNTIL WE LEVELED **BACK UP**, WHEN ACTUALLY WE'D JUST IGNORE CHAOS UNTIL THE HEAT DEATH OF THE UNIVERSE.

AND THEN, Y'KNOW, NOT OUR PROBLEM.

BUT THEN HE ARGUED ME DOWN FROM INFINITY TO 24 HOURS.

THAT'S LESS THAN IDEAL.

HE HAD A BETTER BARGAINING POSITION SINCE HE'S ALL-POWERFUL.

EXCUSES, EXCUSES.

OUR TIME WOULD BE BETTER SPENT **NOT** ARGUING WITH ONE ANOTHER FOR ONCE

NAME **ONE** THING TEAMWORK EVER ACCOMPLISHED

CIVILIZATION.

NAME **ONE GOOD** THING.

THE BANKING SYSTEM THAT EMPOWERS ME WITH WEALTH BEYOND IMAGINING EVEN AS IT STARVES YOU.

HOW IS THAT A GOOD THING?!

FOR **ME**.

OH, **FINE**. LET'S WORK TOGETHER.

AT THE VERY **LEAST** WE'LL PROVE IT'S A BAD IDEA.

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WE JUST NEED TO HIT SOME QUESTS.

COLLECT 10 RAZORHORN GOAT PELTS OR WHATEVER.

SOMETHING QUICK, EASY, AND *FARMABLE*.

YOU DON'T *FARM* GOATS.

THEY'RE *ON* A FARM, THOUGH.

SHUT UP D'YOU SMELL THAT? IT'S THE SOUND OF OPPORTUNITY.

OUCH! I'VE SUFFERED AN INJURY SO TRIVIAL I'LL TAKE TIME TO EXPLAIN IT. I STUBBED MY TOE ON A BAG OF MY OWN GIL.

OH, NO! THAT SOUNDS LIKE IT HAS A SMALL BUT MAYBE ***HUGE*** CHANCE OF TURNING FATAL SUDDENLY.

OH, NO!

BUT DON'T WORRY, I HAVE JUST THE THING FOR YOU!

IT'S A REPREHENSIBLY EXPENSIVE CURE. ER, A ***MIRACLE*** CURE!

WHAT, LIKE FAERY WINGS?

LIKE THOSE, YES.

I WOULD PAY ***HANDSOMELY*** FOR A CURE SUCH AS THAT!

PERFECT! WE CAN INJURE OTHER PEOPLE AND CURE THEM WITH THE SAME WINGS EVERY TIME!

GREAT. HAND OVER THE MONEY AND WE'LL GET BACK TO YOU IN A WEEK OR SEVEN.

YES, THE MONEY IS YOURS JUST AS SOON AS YOU DELIVER THE WINGS TO ME.

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OKAY. I'VE GOT A LEAD ON A FAERIE AND THIS CARAVAN AND BLAH BLAH.

YOU'RE MAKING THIS WAY MORE COMPLICATED THAN IT HAS TO BE. BEHOLD:

OUR "FAERIE"

BUT THAT'S A BABY

UNTIL WE GLUE WINGS TO ITS BACK.

WHERE'D WE GET THE WINGS?

RIPPED STRAIGHT FROM THE BACK OF A REAL FAERIE, OF COURSE.

WAIT. IF WE *HAVE* ACCESS TO A REAL FAERIE, THEN WHY DON'T WE JUST USE THAT?

THINK IT THROUGH, RED

WE HAD TO KILL IT AFTER RIPPING OUT ITS WINGS.

THEY NEED THOSE TO LIVE.

I GUESS WHAT I'M ASKING IS: THEN WHY'D WE RIP OUT ITS WINGS TO BEGIN WITH?

TO PUT ON A BABY'S BACK.

WHAT GLORIES COULD I WORK WERE I GIVEN BACK THOSE LAST TWO MINUTES OF MY LIFE?

PROBABLY, LIKE, LOTS.

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HERE YA GO. ONE MIRACLE CURE IN THE FORM OF FAERIE WINGS. TA-DA!

LOOKS A BIT *BABY* TO ME.

DON'T BE STUPID *AND* UGLY.

OF COURSE IT'S A FAERIE. IT'S GOT WINGS.

HOW DO I KNOW YOU DIDN'T JUST STEAL A BABY AND GLUE FAERIE WINGS TO IT?

IF WE ALREADY HAD A REAL FAERIE, THEN WHY WOULD WE TEAR ITS WINGS OFF ONLY TO GLUE THEM ON A BABY THAT WE'D HAVE TO STEAL?

TO INFLICT THE MOST HARM IN THE LEAST TIME, *DUH.*

SHUT. *UP.*

LOOK, DO YOU *WANT* TO BE MIRACLE CURED OR WHAT?

ACTUALLY, MY TOE DOESN'T HURT ANY MORE, SO I DON'T NEED TO BE CUR—

AH! YOU TOUCHED IT, THAT COUNTS! THAT TOTALLY *COUNTS*! QUEST COMPLETE!

POOF!

PAYMENT ACCEPTED SCATTER!

WAIT, MY MONEY! COME BACK!

YOUR FAERIE SHAT ITSELF!

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OKAY, AFTER ALL THAT PLANNING, TEAMWORK, AND SKILL USE, I BET WE NEARLY GOT ALL OF OUR LEVELS BACK.

LET'S JUST CHECK THE OL' CHARACTER SHEET...

SUITABLE FOR CH... Y

OH, WHAT? C'MON!

Red Mage1
CHARACTER NAME

Crimson Mage 30xp / 1,000xp
CLASS AND LEVEL

Lawful Amazing
ALIGNMENT

Okay
RELIGION/

OUTLOOK NOT SO GOOD THROUGH THE WHOLLY *FICTIONAL* LENS YOU VIEW REALITY, RED MAGE?

WE'RE GONNA HAVE TO KIDNAP A LOT OF BABIES.

THAT'S *FINE*, IT GIVES ME TIME TO DEPOSIT MY NEW HUGE BAG OF MONEY

THE WORLD WILL *END* IN LESS THAN 24 HOURS, THIEF WHO CARES ABOUT MONEY?

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU GUYS HAVE IN MIND, BUT I'M GOING TO STAY RICH AND OPULENT IN THE END TIMES.

ARE YOU JOKING?

DAY-TO-DAY SURVIVAL WILL BE THE ONLY THING ANYONE CARES ABOUT.

MONEY WOULDN'T BE WORTH THE ACT OF PICKING IT UP

A DIRT FARMER WITH A PLOW WOULD BE THE RICHEST MAN IN *THE WORLD* BECAUSE HE COULD MAKE FOOD.

WEALTH THAT BELONGS TO THOSE WHO *MAKE* IT? GREAT ELF IN THE SKY...

WE MUST STOP THIS HORRIBLE FUTURE NO MATTER THE COST!

SO LONG AS SAID COST REMAINS ON THE BACKS OF THE POOR

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I DON'T SEE HOW WE CAN FIND ENOUGH BABIES, FAERIES, OR TRIVIAL INJURIES TO PULL THIS OFF IN THE TIME ALLOTTED

I LIKE THE PLAN – BECAUSE I HATE BABIES, FAERIES, AND PEOPLE – BUT IT'S NOT LOOKING GOOD FOR US.

MAYBE WE'RE TRYING TOO HARD.

WE'VE NEVER DONE THAT AND YOU GODDAMN KNOW IT.

WELL, YEAH. BUT I MEAN, MAYBE WE CAN'T MAKE OUR OWN QUESTS.

WE HAVE TO FIND THEM OUT THERE IN THE WORLD. ROAMING FREE, PURE. BEAUTIFUL.

THAT GOT A LITTLE WEIRD AT THE END.

GUYS, GUYS, GUYS! I DID A GOOOD THING!

I FOUND A QUEST!

FANTASTIC!

ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS HELP THIS LADY FIND HER BABY AND KILL THE TERRIBLE PEOPLE WHO TOOK IT FROM HER!

AWKWARD.

NO, I HAVE AN IDEA.

AND SO..

SIR, IS THAT YOUR BABY?

IT MOST CERTAINLY IS NOT!

QUEST COMPLETE!

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THIS DAMN TOWN *CAN'T* BE TAPPED OUT OF QUESTS YET.

THERE'S THAT MORTALLY WOUNDED GUY I BET *HE* NEEDS HELP.

WHO?

THE GUY YOU'RE STAND-ING ON.

SMK

NO, HE'S FINE. HOW'D THIS *HAPPEN* TO US?

WELL, TECHNICALLY, I THINK *WE* HAPPENED TO *HIM*.

NO, I MEAN THIS SCROUNGING FOR QUESTS.

WE WERE KINGS OF A *CITY*!

MELMOND OR SOMETHING. I DON'T KNOW

ALL HUMAN MUD TOWNS LOOK ALIKE.

CRAPPY.

WE RAN THAT TOWN FROM ITS VAST CRIMINAL UNDERGROUND TO ITS GUARDS.

YEAH FOR LIKE, FIFTEEN *MINUTES*.

YOU'RE RIGHT. TURNING THAT TOWN INTO A SMOKING HOLE WAS ONE OF THE *COOLEST* THINGS I'VE EVER DONE.

LOOK AT US NOW.

[illegible] NOT EVEN FIT TO MURDER A HOBO.

HOW ARE WE GOING TO SAVE ARISTOCRACY FROM THE POOR?

YOU MEAN "THE WORLD FROM DESTRUCTION".

THAT'S WHAT I SAID.

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YA-HA!

AAAAAAAARGH!

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

SAVED YOUR LIFE, LADY

HE WAS A MONSTER

HE DIDN'T... DIDN'T LOOK LIKE A MONSTER

I'LL PROVE IT TO YOU.

WHEN I CARVE HIS MASK OFF HE'LL LOOK TOTALLY GROSS.

I SWEAR, IT'S LIKE THESE PEOPLE DON'T EVEN WANT US TO SAVE THE WORLD

OKAY, NEW RULE. NO MORE SPLITTING UP.

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GUYS, WE'RE GOING ABOUT THIS ALL WRONG!

SO, PAR FOR THE COURSE

WE DON'T ***NEED*** TO LEVEL UP!

BECAUSE IT'S A RIDICULOUS FANTASY?

NO, THE DESIGNERS NEVER IMAGINED THAT LOW-LEVEL CHARACTERS WOULD HAVE ACCESS TO VAST, ***VAST*** FORTUNES!

WE CAN JUST ***BUY*** THE BEST EQUIPMENT AND BE AS POWERFUL AS EVER!

WHAT ***VAST*** FORTUNE ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

Y'KNOW FROM OUR ADVENTURES.

HOW CAN I EXPLAIN TO YOU THAT I DID NOT TRAVEL THE WORLD ROBBING IT OF ITS TREASURES JUST TO TURN AROUND AND HAND THEM BACK TO A BUNCH OF RUBES?

OH, WAIT THAT EXPLAINED IT FINE.

SPEND A SMALL PORTION OF YOUR RICHES ***NOW*** AND GET MANY ***MORE*** RICHES WHEN YOU'RE HERALDED AS THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD.

SAVIOR.

PEOPLE ***LOVE*** SAVIORS. LOVE 'EM.

THAT COULD WORK FOR ME.

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GREETINGS, SHOPKEEP!

MY BAND OF HEARTY ADVENTURERS AND I SHOULD LIKE TO PURCHASE VARIOUS AND DEADLY WEAPONS ON THIS FINE DAY

THEN YOU COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE, YOU DID

YES, I THOUGHT SO TOO!

NOW WATCH AS I GET US AN AMAZING DEAL

WE'D LIKE TO BUY EXCALIBUR, THE MASAMUNE, *TWO* LAEVATEINNS, AND, HMMM, DURANDAL PLEASE.

MATE, I DON'T KNOW WHAT MANNER'A SMIFFY YOU'RE *USED TO*, BUT THIS HERE ESTABLISHMENT DON'T PARLAY IN MYTHIC ITEMS STRAIGHT FROM THE HOARY MISTS OF LEGEND

WE'LL TAKE A *SPELLSLINGER'S LONGSWORD* AND FOR MY SHADY LOOKING FRIENDS, A PAIR OF *MAURADER'S KNIVES*

ENCHANT THE ARMORED BRUTE'S *CHAINBLADES*

MY TECHNICAL AND BAD ASS TERM FOR THE *LAMENTABLY* NAMED "SWORD-CHUCKS"

WITH ACCURACY GEMS.

BETTER PUT EVER-BURNING DOUBLE *MEGA* VORPAL ENHANCEMENTS ON THE LOT

WE'LL MAKE HEADS *ROLL*.

AND BURST INTO *FLAMES*.

FROM ACROSS THE *STREET*

LOOK, MATE. I DON'T NEED THIS. THERE'S REAL WORK WHAT NEEDS SEEING TO. NOW, WE'VE GOT *BOTH* KINDS OF WEAPONS HERE.

SWORDS AND AXES.

I SHOULD HAVE *KNOWN* THIS WAS A PODUNK FORGE WHEN THERE WEREN'T ANY MITHRIL AUTOMATON SERVANTS.

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AND THEN PUT EVER-BURNING DOUBLE ***MEGA*** VORPAL ENHANCEMENTS ON THE LOT

OH, A FINE CHOICE, SIR, A ***FINE*** CHOICE

SO. YOU'VE GOT ALL THAT IN STOCK?

OH MY, YES. I'LL HAVE TO DO THE ENCHANTMENTS OF COURSE

WELL, OF COURSE.

WHICH MUST MAKE YOU ASK ***WHY*** A WIZARD POWERFUL ENOUGH TO IMPART THOSE INCREDIBLE MAGICAL EFFECTS WOULD SPEND HIS FINAL DAYS IN A DANK SHOP

NOT REALLY

DON'T CARE.

HATE YOU, HATE YOU, HATE YOU.

IT'S NOT DANK IN HERE

I SUPPOSE TO TRULY UNDERSTAND MY CHOICE YOU'D NEED AN ENCYCLOPEDIC KNOWLEDGE OF MY ENTIRE LIFE. SO, LET'S BEGIN.

UH, SIR? WE DON'T HAVE ***TIME*** FOR THIS, ACTUALLY

OH, BUT YOU DO

ENHANCING ALL THOSE WEAPONS WILL TAKE ME ***SEVEN*** WEEKS OR SO.

SEVEN WEEKS?

SEVEN WEEKS.

AND ALSO THREE YEARS.

WHAT?!

REFINING TWO ACCURACY GEMS ALONE WILL TAKE ***SEVERAL*** MONTHS.

AND ***MEGA VORPAL*** ENHANCEMENTS, WELL THOSE THINGS DON'T GROW ON TREES, Y'KNOW.

THOUGH I WISH THEY DID SOMETIMES!

THEN AGAIN, I'D BE OUT OF A JOB, SO LIFE IS A BALANCE

WE ALREADY LEFT, YOU OLD BUZZARD!

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OUTTA THE WAY, BRAINIAC WATCH AS A ***REAL*** WIZARD SCHOOLS YOU IN THE FINE ART OF ACQUIRING POWER

BUT I ***AM*** A REAL WIZARD

REAL SHITTY

OH YEAH, THAT ONE'S GETTING WRITTEN DOWN. LIKE, ***BIG*** TIME.

OH, DON'T LOOK AT ME LIKE ***THAT***

WHATEVS. MY WIT IS SIMPLY WASTED ON YOU CHUMPS.

NOW OBSERVE AND DIE

OKAY DARK, MUSTY, VAGUELY UNPLEASANT ODOR LOOKIN' ***GOOD***, MAGIC SHOP

HELLO, MY GOOD—OH WHAT THE HELL IS THIS WE ***JUST GOT AWAY*** FROM YOU.

HA! I'M AN IMMENSELY POWERFUL WIZARD, I CAN RUN ***MANY*** MORE THAN A SINGLE SHOP!

HOW MANY?

THIS ONE.

OKAY, WE'RE DONE HERE.

BUT I HAVE A WIDE SELECTION OF SPELLS FOR SALE.

DOOM SPELLS?

CERTAINLY WE'VE GOT LIGHT DOOM, GREATER DOOM, ALL THE DOOMS OF THE RAINBOW!

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SPELLS WITH WHICH I CAN BRING RUIN AND PAIN AND A WHOLE LOTTA FIRE?

OH, YES, AND IN A VARIETY OF FLAVORS!

APOCALYPSE ARMAGEDDON, AND RAGNAROK.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

WELL, ARMAGEDDON AND APOCALPYSE ARE, HMM, LIKE WHITE AND RED WINE.

BOTH ARE GOOD, BUT IT'S GENERALLY PREFERRED TO BRING ARMAGEDDON SPELLS TO BEAR IN SORT OF A MORE MILITARY CONTEXT.

ALSO, BY DESIGN THEY LEAVE A FEW SURVIVORS.

WHAT FOR?!

TO BUILD UP TO THE NEXT WAR WAS ALWAYS MY GUESS.

NOW, A RAGNAROK SPELL, *THAT'LL* WIPE OUT EVERYTHING IN ITS RANGE.

OKAY, I LIKE THE SOUND OF THAT

THE ONLY DOWNSIDE IS THAT THEY *REALLY* NEED THREE YEARS TO BE EFFECTIVE

THAT'S *HARDLY* IDEAL

IT *IS* SITUATIONAL, TO BE QUITE FRANK.

Y'KNOW? I BETTER TAKE ONE OF EACH.

GOTTA COVER MY BASES.

OH, MY! IT'S A WINDFALL DAY!

I'LL JUST NEED TO SEE YOUR WIZARD'S LICENSE.

HOW'S THAT?

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YOUR LICENSE

AS YOU *OBVIOUSLY* KNOW FROM ALL THOSE ETHICS COURSES AT THE WIZARDRY SCHOOL YOU MUST'VE ATTENDED..

YES, UH, THE ETHICS. I LEARNED ALL ABOUT *THOSE* DURING MY SCHOOL.

..WE CAN'T GRANT ACCESS TO THESE *MONSTROUSLY* POWERFUL SPE..S TO ANY OL' JOE JERK OFF THE STREET

MR. JERK?

SORRY, I WAS TH,NKING ABOUT HOW I WISH I COULD CAST SPE..S.

YES, WE.., WE MUST COMPLETE TH,S BUSINESS LOAN PAPERWORK.

YES, OF COURSE. PLEASE, GO ON.

NOW THEN, ARE WE CALL,NG IT *THE JERKIN HUT* OR *JOE'S JERKIN SHACK*?

WHAT IF I SAID MY LICENSE IS IN MY OTHER ROBES AND ALSO THAT'S A VERY PLAUS,B..E THING THAT COULD HAPPEN TO ANYONE?

A REMARKABLY COMMON PROBLEM AMONG MAGES IN THESE PARTS!

THAT'LL BE THIRTY *MILLION* GIL.

NO, THAT'S STUPID AND *YOU'RE* STUPID

THESE ARE INCREDIBLY RARE SPELLS, S,R.

WE'RE LUCKY TO SEE ONE WIZARD IN A GENERATION ABLE TO CAST THEIR [illegible].

YOUR WHOLE BUSINESS PLAN IS TO SERVE AS MANY AS ONE PERSON EVERY THIRTY-,SH YEARS?

WERE IT NOT FOR DOOMSDAY SCENARIOS AND THE LEGENDARY WARRIOR TROUPES WHO FIGHT THEM I'D HAVE TO ABANDON MY RIDICULOUS WAY OF LIFE.

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SHOULDN'T I GET SOME KINDA DISCOUNT ON THESE SPELLS?

IT'S IN *YOUR* BEST INTERESTS THAT I GET THEM, Y'KNOW

MY USE OF THOSE SPELLS WILL STOP YOU FROM GETTING KILLED BY A DREADFUL MONSTER

FROM OUTS DE OUR REALITY

THESE ARE THE PRICES AND LIKE A FENCE OR A SHORT HEDGE, THERE IS NOTHING YOU CAN DO TO GET AROUND THAT

OH, THERE IS *SOMETHING* I CAN DO.

WHAT I LEARNED TODAY IS THAT REALLY OLD WIZARDS DON'T GET THAT WAY BY BEING EASY TO KILL.

SO, YOU DIDN'T GET ANY SPELLS?

IN THE SENSE THAT GETTING *STABBED* GIVES YOU A BLADE, MAN, I GOT SPELLS.

OKAY.

I TRUST TWEEDLEDUM AND TWEEDLEUGLY ARE DONE *WASTING* OUR TIME?

WHICH--

SHHH, IT DOESN'T MATTER.

LET'S TAKE A WALK ON THE THIEF SIDE.

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WHAT A HARROWING *ADVENTURE* WE HAD

WE FELL THROUGH TO THE OUTER PLANES WHERE WE CONSEQUENTLY SAVED THE ENTIRE MULTIVERSE FROM BEING SPLIT ASUNDER BY A SUPER-INTELLIGENT RIFT IN TIME

YET NONE HERE SO MUCH AS *SUSPECT* THEIR LIVES WERE IN DANGER OF ANY KIND

OR THAT *WE* SAVED THEM FROM *CERTAIN DEATH.*

THAT *IS* THE HERO'S LOT IN LIFE

OURS IS NOT A PATH TO GLORY, BUT A PATH OF *SACRIFICE* SO OTHERS MAY NOT HAVE TO.

ALSO IT'S A PATH LITTERED WITH *OBSCENELY POWERFUL* ARTIFACTS WOVEN FROM THE VERY TAPESTRY OF CREATION!

AND NOW WE SHALL USE THOSE WEAPONS TO FORGE AN ERA OF PEACE AND ORDER!

YOU THERE, CITIZEN! WHAT DIRE THREATS BE THERE TO OUR KINGDOM?

OH, IT'S TERRIBLE, JUST TERRIBLE!

THIS BAND OF THIEVES STEALS EVERYTHING YOU OWN AND THEN USES AMNESIA DUST ON YOU SO YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT HAPPENED!

SHOCK!

DISMAY!

FIVE MINUTES LATER.

AND THAT'S HOW YOU GET IT DONE.

THINK WE USED TOO MUCH?

NO SUCH THING.

LET US BEGIN OUR GRAND ADVENTURE! BARRY, YOU HAD EVERYONE'S WEAPONS.

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OKAY, LET'S DIVY UP SOME *MEGA* LOOT!

QUICK QUESTION. WHY DO MY HANDS FEEL LIKE THEY'RE BURNING AS IF SEARED BY THE LIGHT OF AN ANGRY AND RIGHTEOUS GOD?

OH, QUIT BEING A FRUIT AND GIVE ME A DAGGER.

AHH!

I THINK THE IDIOT CELESTIAL WHO MADE THIS THING FORGOT THAT HANDLES AREN'T MADE OUT OF PAIN.

SHUT UP AND GIMME. I'M MOVING ON UP TO *AXE MURDERIN'* PEOPLE.

I APPEAR TO HAVE COME *AFLAME*

ARE YOU GUYS OKAY?

THAT SWORD'S NOT HURTING YOU, FIGHTER?

OF COURSE NOT HOW COULD IT HURT ME?

UNLESS IT WAS *SECRETLY* WIELDED BY MY ENEMIES!

BUT I DON'T HAVE ENEMIES.

UNLESS SECRETLY I DO!

BUT I'M NOT ONE OF THEM.

THIS IS GONNA EAT UP A LOT OF DAY-LIGHT

UNLESS SECRETLY I AM!

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IT'S *OBVIOUS* WHAT'S GOING ON. THESE WEAPONS ARE ENCHANTED AGAINST BEAUTY

AS WELL AS INCREDIBLE INTELLECT

INCLUDING *NON*-IMAGINARY INTELLECTS. ALSO HYGIENE.

OHHHH.

MY THEORY WAS THAT THESE WERE WEAPONS CAST IN THE GREAT FORGE OF THE HEAVENS BY *SMITHIEL* HIMSELF.

BUT YOU GUYS MUST BE RIGHT BECAUSE WEAPONS LIKE THAT WOULD HARM EVIL PEOPLE WHO TRY TO WIELD THEM.

AND WE'RE ALL HEROES.

BIG TIME.

SMITHIEL? *REALLY?*

WHAT ELSE WOULD HIS NAME BE?

DOUBLE MINT TO MY FRIENDS.

THAT...WHAT?

'CAUSE HE'S A BIG RED.

IT'S GUM HUMOR.

STOP USING THAT VOICE!

WHAT'S HIS PROBLEM?

NO IDEA, ORBIT.

'CAUSE OF THE TRIDENT, YOU SEE.

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HANG ON TO YOUR ASSES AND BEHOLD MY *LATEST* CREATION!

THERE'S NOTHING TO BEHOLD

YEAH, WE WATCHED YOU MAKE IT.

AND HE LOOKS AS DUMB AS WE TOLD YOU HE WOULD

BUT ON THE *BRIGHT SIDE*, IT'S LIKE FIGHTER'S GONE.

OH, HE'S IN THERE

SOMEWHERE..

ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS MARCH H.M RIGHT UP TO CHAOS AND LET THE FIREWORKS FLY!

OR WE *ROLL* HIM RIGHT UP TO CHAOS AND *THEN* LET THE FIREWORKS FLY!

WE'RE GONNA GET SNOWCONES WHILE YOU DO THAT, MKAY?

LET US KNOW HOW IT GOES.

SNOW CONES?

GUYS?

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TWO SNOWCONES, PLEASE

HOW GRAND!

AREN'T YOU THE KING?

AND ISN'T IT YOUR FAULT WE WERE SENT OUT INTO THE WORLD WHERE EVERYTHING WE'VE DONE HAS SIGNIFICANTLY CONTRIBUTED TO ITS DOOM?

HEAVENS NO. I'VE BEEN TOO BUSY COORDINATING ABSURD WARS TO DO ANYTHING LIKE THAT PROBABLY

NOW, HOW ABOUT THOSE SNO-CONES.

WHAT IS THIS?

IT'S NO CONE!

IT'S A *CUBE*

OH, NO. THAT'S A *COMMON* MISCONCEPTION. IT'S A *STUBE*

A WHAT?

THE SEVEN-SIDED CUBE. I INVENTED IT

THERE ARE ONLY SIX SIDES.

THE *SEVENTH* SIDE IS THE *INSIDE*.

HE'S GOT US THERE

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ONE SNOW CONE, PLEASE, GOOD SIR.

SHOULDN'T YOU BE WATCHING FIGHTER?

HE'S PERFECTLY SAFE

HE'S A WEAPONIZED WRECKING BALL, OF COURSE *HE'S* SAFE

I THOUGHT HE WAS MORE OF A WRECKING-BALL-IZED WEAPON COLLECTION, PERSONALLY

EITHER WAY, HE'S FINE *AND* I'M GETTING A SNOW CONE.

I'M NOT CONCERNED ABOUT FIGHTER. I'M WORRIED ABOUT THE IDIOTIC THINGS HE'LL DO WHILE UNATTENDED THAT *WE'LL* INEVITABLY GET BLAMED FOR.

WHAT? I DIDN'T ORDER A *STUBE!*

HOW IN THE HELL DID YOU KNOW WHAT THAT WAS?!

IT'S GOT SEVEN SIDES, HASN'T IT

IT'S KIND OF AMAZING HOW LITTLE THAT ANSWERED THE QUESTION.

OH, THEY HAD AN ARTICLE ON STUBOIDS IN THE LAST *INVENTOR'S QUARTERLY*

IT'S THE MOST EDUCATIONAL MENS' MAGAZINE IN PRINT!

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HOW ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO EAT THESE THINGS ANYWAY?

IT'S SIMPLE START WITH THE ANTI-MOST BOTTOM SIDE AND THEN WORK COUNTER UP-WISE UNTIL DONE

THAT SOUNDED LIKE THE DUMBEST WAY POSSIBLE TO STAY "START AT THE TOP"

I WAS USING PROPER STUBE TERMINOLOGY. THE TOP MERELY APPEARS TO BE THE TOP WHEN SEVEN-SIDED CUBES ARE PROJECTED INTO REGULAR SPACE.

OH, LOOK. FIGHTER'S GONE I'M SURPRISED TO LEARN THIS.

HE CAN'T HAVE GOTTEN FAR AWAY

MEANWHILE, QUITE FAR

WOULD YOU LIKE A ROOM, SIR?

IT'S VERY CRAMPED IN HERE, SO YES, I COULD USE SOME ROOM. THANK YOU!

SO,, MORE THAN ONE THEN SIR?

SURE, WHATEVER Y'GOT

I DON'T EVEN HAVE TO ASK WHO, HOW, OR WHY

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IT'S ONLY ***NIGHT*** TIME. IT'S NOT THE END OF THE WORLD

NO, BUT WE'RE CLOSER TO IT THAN WE WERE!

WHAT DO YOU CARE? YOU HATE THE WORLD AND EVERYONE IN IT

SHOULDN'T YOU BE HAPPY IT'S ALL GOING TO BURN?

I WANTED TO BE THE ONE TO DO IT

NO ONE CAN SAY YOU HAVEN'T SIGNIFICANTLY CONTRIBUTED TO THE END OF ALL THINGS.

BUT I WON'T BE THE ARROW THAT PIERCES THE QUIVERING HEART OF EVERYTHING THAT LIVES.

OH, BLACK MAGE.

MAYBE YOU'RE NOT THE ARROW, BUT YOUR LIFE HAS BEEN THE SLOW AND INEVITABLE DRAW OF THAT BOW

YOU MEAN IT?

YES.

DEFINITELY HELL, I'M ***SURPRISED*** CREATION HAS LASTED THIS LONG WITH YOU ACTIVE IN IT

YOU GUYS ARE ***ALMOST*** AS GOOD TO ME AS I DESERVE.

I STILL DON'T FEEL LIKE I HAVE ENOUGH ROOM.

YOU RESERVED ***EVERY*** AVAILABLE ROOM, WE HAVE.

BUT I BELIEVE WE CAN ARRANGE SOMETHING FOR YOU, SIR.

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THIS IS NOTHING TO PANIC ABOUT WE DO SOME OF OUR BEST WORK UNDER COVER OF NIGHT

YOU'RE RIGHT WE'VE GOT A SOLID EIGHT OR NINE HOURS BEFORE THE SUN RISES.

PLENTY OF TIME TO FIND FIGHTER SO HE CAN SLAY CHAOS WITH HIS SUPER WEAPONS AND WE CAN TAKE ALL THE CREDIT

ESPECIALLY GIVEN THAT WE *KNOW* HE MUST BE IN THE INN DISTRICT

I CAN'T DECIDE IF THIS IS UNFAIR OR EXACTLY WHAT WE DESERVE FOR BEING, WELL, Y'KNOW, US.

TECHNICALLY WE'RE JUST RIDING A WAVE TO ITS INEVITABLE CRASH. IT'S THE WHOLE REST OF THE WORLD THAT'S GETTING UNFAIRLY PUNISHED

HMM. A THOUGHT OCCURS.

IT TURNED NIGHT BECAUSE FIGHTER WENT TO AN INN.

AND NOW IT'S MORNING BECAUSE HE WENT TO BED

YOU REALLY WORK DOUBLE-TIME TO EARN THAT "*BRAINS OF THE OPERATION*" MONICKER, DON'T YOU, RM.

BUT HOW DID HE GO TO BED WITH THOSE WEAPONS STRAPPED TO HIS BODY?

HEY, GUYS!

WELL, OF COURSE ALL THE ULTRA WEAPONS ARE GONE.

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I DIDN'T GIVE THEM AWAY, I SOLD THEM.

FOR INFINITE MONEY EACH?

BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT THEY'RE WORTH.

BOTH AS OBJECTS OF TREASURE AND INSTRUMENTS THAT WILL SAVE THE LIVES OF, WELL, EVERYONE.

IS INFINITE G!L HOW MUCH ALL THE ROOMS AT ALL THE INNS IN TOWN COST?

THEY KEPT OFFERING ME *MORE* ROOM BECAUSE I WAS SO CRAMPED

BUT IT WAS NEVER ENOUGH. UNTIL THEY STARTED TALKING ABOUT PUTTING DOWN PAVEMENTS.

BUT WHY WOULD YOU INSULT A SIDEWALK?

THAT'S... *WHAT?*

SO, THIS IS WHAT IT'S LIKE WHEN HE MAKES YOU TOO STUPID TO THINK

DOWN PAVEMENTS...

OH, LORD HE MEANS DOWN PAYMENTS, BUT HE'S AN IDIOT.

HE FINALLY GOT ENOUGH ROOM WHEN THEY STARTED TAKING THE PRICELESS ARTIFACTS TO PAY FOR ALL THE ROOMS HE ASKED FOR.

YOU SOLD EVERY ANCIENT SUPER WEAPON OF THE GODS FOR A ROOM AT THE INN?

I'M NOT AN IDIOT, THIEF

I GOT EVERY ROOM IN TOWN.

THAT THAT MAKES IT BETTER.

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IF WE OWN EVERY ROOM IN TOWN, THEN WE'RE ***ONE STEP*** AWAY FROM RUNNING THIS MUDHOLE.

FROM THERE WE CAN DO SOMETHING STUPID BUT ODDLY EFFECTIVE LIKE MAKE CHAOS ILLEGAL SO HE GOES AWAY AND WE DON'T HAVE TO FIGHT HIM AND THEN IMMEDIATELY DIE.

TERRIFIC! OF COURSE, I ONLY RENTED ALL THE ROOMS FOR ONE NIGHT

WHICH WAS LAST NIGHT

OF...COURSE.

ANYWAY, I DIDN'T SELL ALL THE WEAPONS.

OH. YOU KEPT THE SWORDS...THAT NONE OF US CAN USE.

BUT I'VE GOT A PLAN TO MAKE 'EM USABLE!

AND I CAN'T WAIT TO NOT HEAR A WORD OF IT!

IF YOU GUYS HAD LET ME MASTER TIME MAGIC WHEN I SUGGESTED IT, WE COULD HAVE GONE BACK AND UNDID EVERYTHING WE'VE DONE WITH OUR LIVES SO THE END OF EVERYTHING WOULDN'T HAPPEN.

LOOK, IT'S TIME TO MAN UP

WE CAN'T PUT THIS OFF ANY LONGER.

IT'S TIME WE MET OUR FATE

P.S. MY FATE IS TO SAVE MYSELF BY SACRIFICING YOU DWEEBS TO CHAOS.

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YOU CAN'T SACRIFICE US TO CHAOS.

YOU'RE DE-LEVELED TOO MUCH TO CAST ANYTHING MORE HARMFUL THAN COLOR SPRAY

IF I CAST IT IN YOUR FACE WHILE YOU WALK ALONG THE EDGE OF A CLIFF, THERE'S A SLIM TO MINOR CHANCE YOU... FALL OFF!

WELL, I WON'T WALK ALONG CLIFFS THEN

SAME HERE.

WHO'S CLIFF?

LET'S JUST KEEP GOING.

AGREED

OUR BEST BET AT THIS POINT IS TO MEET CHAOS ***BEFORE*** THE APPOINTED HOUR IN A LAST DITCH EFFORT TO CATCH HIM COMPLETELY BY SURPRISE.

OKAY AND THEN WHAT?

AND THEN HOPE THE SHOCK TRIGGERS A HEART ATTACK

IN EACH OF US SO WE DIE BEFORE HE PERFORMS AN INFINITY VARIETY OF ELDRTICH TORTURES UPON US?

NO, HIM.

HE HAS THE HEART ATTACK

VERY GOOD

LET'S CALL THAT ***PLAN*** [illegible]

HEY, THAT OPERATION TITLE'S NO COINCIDENCE! IT'S INTENDED TO BE AN INSULT!

DAMN, I WARNED THE BOYS DOWN IN CRYPTOGRAPHY YOU WERE GETTING CLOSE. BUT IT'S TOO LATE [illegible]

YOU CRACKED THE CODE.

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ELDER GODS MIGHT BE PARTICULARLY SUSCEPTIBLE TO HEART ATTACKS. WHO KNOWS? I SURE DON'T

I SAY WE FIND OUT THE HARD WAY. WHICH IS ALSO THE ONLY WAY

THAT'S A LONG SHOT

HEY, IT WORKED BEFORE

WE DIDN'T DO IT ON PURPOSE

HMMM. THAT GIVES ME A DOUBLE BRILLIANT IDEA..

PURPOSE, FIGHTER. NOT PORPOISE

OH.

I'M CURIOUS...

DON'T ASK HIM. HE'LL TELL US.

KNOWELDGE IS THE TERRIBLE BURDEN OF MY PEOPLE.

FIGHTER WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH A PORPOISE?

Eeeka eeka eeek!

"I am a shark!"

BUT WHY IS IT A SHARK?

NO, SEE THE PORPOISE IS DISGUISED AS A SHARK

I WARNED YOU I GODDAMN WARNED YOU.

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WE'RE GOING ABOUT THIS WHOLE CHAOS *THING* THE WRONG WAY

WHY BREAK WITH *TRADITION* NOW?

NO, NO. SERIOUSLY

WE *CAN'T* OUT-FIGHT HIM. WE CAN'T OUT-*CAST* HIM, AND WE CAN'T OUT-THINK HIM.

BUT WE *CAN* OUT-STUPID H.M.

HOW?

SO, WE JUST POINT, UH *HIM* AT CHAOS AND...

AND WIN.

IT'S THE SAME PRINCIPLE AS OUR ANCIENT MEGA WEAPONS PLAN, BUT WITH TALKING.

YES. INSTEAD OF DRAINING CHAOS OF HIT POINTS, WE'LL DRAIN HIM OF *INTELLIGENCE* UNTIL HE FORGETS HOW TO BREATHE.

CHAOS BREATHES?

WHO CARES?

HE'LL BE TOO *DUMB* TO KNOW HE *CAN'T* SUFFOCATE AND WE WIN!

OKAY I'M EXCITED ABOUT THIS PLAN.

YEAH, IT HARDLY SEEMS LIKE *SUICIDE* AT A...!

POINT WHO AT WHAT?

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OKAY, CHAOS IS JUST OVER THERE

NOW, KEEP IN MIND, HE'S BEYOND OUR FEEBLE MORTAL UNDERSTANDING.

HIS MIND IS AS ALIEN TO US AS OURS ARE TO A ROCK.

WE MUST APPROACH HIM WITH THE UTMOST CAUTION.

OUR ONLY HOPE IS NOT TO PROVOKE HIM INTO A RANDOM ACT OF CATASTROPHE BY—

WHERE'S FIGHTER?

MAN, WHY DO YOU EVEN HAVE TO ASK?

GOOD MORNING, FIGHTER.

WELL, HEY, MR. DOOM-BRINGER!

NO NEED TO BE SO FORMAL.

JUST CALL ME CHAOS.

YOU'RE A COOL GUY, CHAOS.

I KNOW.

I THOUGHT YOU'D BE, LIKE, WAY SCARIER.

DIMENSIONAL DEMON HEAD THAT GREW OUT OF THE NECK OF YOUR MENTOR! AND SECRET WORST ENEMY!

YEAH, NO. THAT'S SCARY. I JUST THOUGHT, I DUNNO, YOU'D BE *SCARY*.

YOU WANT TO SEE SCARY?

TO BE FAIR, IT WAS A *GREAT* PLAN UNTIL IT INVOLVED FIGHTER

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BOOYA!

WELL, THAT'S NOT REALLY SCARY SO MUCH AS IT IS HUGE

RIP THE WORLD ASUNDER WITH NAUGHT BUT MY DREAD HANDS!

YEAH, THAT'D BE SCARY.

BUT THEN WE'D BE TOO DEAD, TO BE SCARED BY IT Y'KNOW?

THIS IS HARDER THAN THOUGHT.

EXCUSE US, MR. CHAOS.

P.S. TICK. TOCK.

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WHAT WERE YOU DOING?

HAVING A QUITE PLEASANT CONVERSATION, UNTIL I WAS OVER HERE SOMEHOW

YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO DESTRY HIS MIND, NOT MAKE FRIENDS!

HE SEEMED NICE

NICE?!

KINDA LONELY

WELL, YOU COMPANIONSHIPPED HIM FROM A WEIRD DEMON HEAD GROWING OUT OF THE NECK OF A GUY WE HATED TO A GIANT WORLD-KILLER

YEAH, IT REALLY SEEMED TO IMPROVE HIS MOOD

SOMETIMES JUST TALKING TO SOMEONE CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE IN THEIR DAY

BUT WE'RE NOT HERE TO HELP CHAOS!

SPEAK FOR YOURSELF.

UH.

HMMM...

AH-HA!

MOST OF US ARE NOT HERE TO HELP CHAOS.

SECRETLY, I COULD MEAN ANY OF US.

WE KNOW IT'S YOU!

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CHAOS REPRESENTS THE DEATH OF EVERYTHING THERE IS.

YOURSELF INCLUDED

WHY IN THE WORLD WOULD YOU WANT TO HELP HIM?

WAY I SEE IT, *YES*, CHAOS IS THE EMBODIMENT OF ALL SUFFERING AND DESTRUCTION.

BUT HE'S ALSO THE WILDCARD OF THE NATURAL FORCES. CHAOS!

DUDE GAVE US *24 HOURS* FOR BASICALLY NO REASON!

WHO KNOWS WHAT HE'LL DO NEXT? OKAY, SURE, HE'LL *DESTROY* THE WORLD

BUT MAYBE HE'LL TURN IT INTO CAKE

OR FIRE.

BUT I FIGURE THERE'S MORE KINDS OF CAKE THAN FIRE, SO THE ODDS ARE *ACTUALLY* IN MY FAVOR.

EVEN I KNOW THAT'S A DUMB PLAN. A DUMB, *DUMB* PLAN.

WAIT! WHAT IF IT'S A CAKE YOU DON'T LIKE?

HADN'T THOUGHT OF THAT

OR A GOOD CAKE, BUT POORLY MADE.

ER, UH...

OR A GOOD CAKE MADE WELL...OUT OF *DEADLY* POISON!!

THIS IS A MUCH MORE COMPLEX ISSUE THAN I HAD ORIGINALLY GIVEN IT CREDIT FOR.

NO SHIT

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FIGHTER! WE **GET** IT, OKAY?

THERE ARE **MANY** FACETS TO THE PROPOSED PASTRYLOGICAL SINGULARITY

OR AN **ECLAIR** MADE OUT OF ROCKS AND MUD?

AND KEEP IN MIND I HAVEN'T EVEN GOTTEN INTO MUFFINS!

CUPCAKES. OR ARE THOSE A SUBSET OF MUFFINS? WE'LL NEED A COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE THAT

THIS CONVERSATION IS SO FAR BEYOND OVER, WHY ARE WE **STILL STUCK** IN IT?

YOU'RE THE ONE WHO BROUGHT UP "CAKE."

I DIDN'T EXPECT IT TO TURN INTO A **THING**.

BUT, NO, YOU'RE RIGHT. I'M TO BLAME FOR THIS.

I, MORE THAN ANYONE, SHOULD HAVE KNOWN ONCE HE GETS AN IDEA RATTLING AROUND IN THAT VAST EMPTY HEAD OF HIS, GETTING IT OUT AGAIN IS LIKE WALKING INTO A CHURCH **WITHOUT** MURDERING EVERYONE INSIDE OF IT

STALKING FROM PEW TO PEW, LOOSING FIRE SPELL AFTER FIRE SPELL INTO THEIR PIOUS FLESH.

"OHHH, HOW COULD OUR GODS LET THIS HAPPEN TO **US**," THEY'D WAIL.

"TAKE IT UP WITH THEM YOURSELF," I'LL SAY

YOU'VE THOUGHT ABOUT THIS.

ENTIRELY TOO MUCH, ACTUALLY

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WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?

LOOKED KINDA LIKE AN IMPOSSIBLY PURE WHITE LIGHT TO ME

WONDER IF THAT'S WHY IT FELT LIKE THE HEAT OF A THOUSAND SUNS BURNING OUT MY WITHERED, BLACKENED SOUL LIKE A GIANT CELESTIAL CIGARETTE BUTT BEING SMUSHED IN MY FACE

LET'S CHECK IT OUT ***DESPITE*** BLACK BEING ***REALLY*** WEIRD ABOUT IT.

DOES CHAOS LOOK A LITTLE MORE PILE OF ASHES TO ANYONE ELSE?

WACHOO!

THIS IS OUR VICTORY. I'M NOT EVEN GOING TO QUESTION IT, MAN.

HEY, LOOK, GUYS.

WITNESSES TO OUR VICTORY!

WHAT, WITNE—NO. NO, WE DID THIS!

THAT'S NOT HOW I CHOOSE TO REMEMBER IT.

THAT'S BECAUSE YOU WEREN'T HERE WHEN.

WHITE MAGE

PREIST

SHAMAN

AND HEALER

KILLED CHAOS.

OH, GODDAMMIT IT.

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HOW'D YOU GET CHAOS BACK TO HIS NOT A GIANT BASTARD SIZE?

CHAOS! YOU'RE TOO TALL!

OH, THAT SO DID **NOT** WORK.

SO DID.

FINE. THEN HOW'D YOU **DEFEAT** HIM?

HE WAS THE EMBODIMENT OF ALL DARKNESS AND ENTROPY.

WE ARE MASTERS OF LIGHT AND ORDER.

DO WE HAVE TO DRAW YOU A MAP?

COULDN'T HURT?

SHHH!

SO, YOU JUST CAST CURE I UNTIL HE CHOKED ON IT?

THERE WAS MORE TO IT THAN THAT.

CAN WE JUST **SKIP** TO THE PART WHERE I KILL YOU?

'CAUSE I OVERHEARD THOSE GUYS TALKING AND NOW I'VE GOT A CRAVING TO START A CAKELOGICAL SINGULARITY.

I MEAN, THAT'S THE KIND OF CRAZY, "OH MAN, LOOK AT THAT EMBODIMENT OF CHAOS GO NUTS" THING PEOPLE EXPECT OUT OF ME.

BUT THEY DON'T EXPECT **THAT**.

THOUGH THEY SHOULD. BUT CAN'T. BUT SHOULD.

CHAOS. WE **WILL** STOP YOU.

YOU KNOW, I'M TALKING ABOUT TURNING YOUR WORLD INTO PURE CONFECTIONARY STRATA.

IT'S A LITTLE **BEYOND** YOUR ABILITY TO INFLUENCE.

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YOU ARE **POWERLESS**, CHAOS.

NO, I'M THE OPPOSITE OF THAT.

YOUR ULTIMATE GOAL IS A UNIVERSE OF PURE ENTROPY, A REALM WITHOUT ORDER!

I SUBMIT TO YOU THAT SUCH A UNIVERSE WOULD BE STATISTICALLY UNIFORM IN COMPOSITION AND THEREFORE IT WOULD BE ORDERED!

ALSO BORING.

CARRY THE INFINITY...

AWW, MAN.

AND THEN WE ZAPPED ENOUGH WHITE MAGIC TO BRING DOWN A VILE GOD OF CHAOTIC ENERGY.

WHICH HE WAS.

SO, THAT WORKED OUT.

THE WAY I (CHOOSE TO) REMEMBER IT, WE DID **ALL THAT** STUFF.

BUT YOU DID NOT.

AFTER WE TOUR THE MEDIEVAL TALK SHOW CIRCUIT TO DISCUSS OUR HARROWING ADVENTURE TO SAVE EVERYTHING, IT'LL BECOME THE TRUTH ANYWAY.

BUT **I** DID IT! IT WAS MY **TIRELESS** WORK TO GUIDE THE NEW AGE OF LIGHT OUT OF DARKNESS!

I GATHERED HEROES TO DEFEAT CHAOS WHEN IT WAS CLEAR **YOU** NEVER WOULD.

AND WE'LL **ALWAYS** THANK YOU FOR THAT. SECRETLY.

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IT'S JUST...IT'S NOT FAIR.

THEY DIDN'T MERELY DO **NOTHING** TO SAVE THE WORLD. THEY ARE THE GREATEST THREAT TO THE SAFETY AND HAPPINESS OF ALL LIFE AS WE KNOW IT.

A PATCH OF MOLD IS MORE DESERVING OF THE ACCOLADES THEY'LL GET BECAUSE AT LEAST MOLD NEVER BURNED DOWN A CITY.

WHAT ABOUT FIRE MOLD?

IF YOU'RE BUILDING YOUR TOWN IN A FIRE MOLD INFESTED SWAMP, YOU DON'T GET TO COMPLAIN WHEN THE WHOLE THING IS DESTROYED BY FIRE MOLD.

ANYWAY, MY POINT IS THE LIGHT WARRIORS ARE GOING TO REAP THE BENEFITS OF SAVING THE VERY WORLD THEY'VE DONE NOTHING BUT ATTEMPT TO DESTROY.

HEY, GUYS. YOU DIDN'T SEE ANY OMNIPOTENT SUPERWIZARDS COME THIS WAY, DID YOU?

WE'RE RUNNING AWAY FROM ONE AND IT'D BE LESS THAN IDEAL IF HE CAME THIS WAY.

VERY REAL LIGHT WARRIORS SAVE WORLD!

DEFINITELY NOT SOME OTHER GUYS;

GENOCIDES AT RECORD LOW

GHT WARRIORS
O OPEN CHAIN
RESTAURANTS
LSO THEME PARK.

MANA VEIN FOU
SCIENTISTS BAFFL
ANNOYED BY FIND
"I HATE THIS RIDICU
FANTASY SETTING

Three years later...
THANK YOU.
– WORDS –
BRIAN CLEVINGER
– ART –
MATT SPAROW
– LETTERS –
JEFF POWELL
DESTINED OR NON?
OH, I'M LOOKING FOR– AH, THERE THEY ARE.
VERY WELL.

YOU DON'T MIND IF WE ORDER, DO YOU, WHITE MAGE?
OH, GO RIGHT AHEAD.
I'LL START WITH THE RAT TAIL SOUP.
NO, NO, HE WON'T.
WHAT? IT SOUNDS GOOD.
UH, THE TWELVE DRAGON NACHOS. GET THOSE INSTEAD.
TWELVE DRAGON NACHOS: Piled so high with toppings there's only room for nine on the plate.
BUT I DON'T WANT NACHOS.
YES YOU DO. YOU WANT THAT A LOT MORE THAN THE SOUP.
WHATEVER. NACHOS, BUT YOU'RE PAYING FOR THEM.
GLADLY.
AND LICH'S RIBS. EXTRA BLOODY.
VERY GOOD.
I'LL HAVE THE IMP SURPRISE.
MENU
MENU
MEN

CHOCOBO FETTUCINE, PLEASE.
EXCELLENT CHOICE. AND TO DRINK?
OH, JUST AN ORB OF WATER FOR ME.
GOBLIN PUNCH, PLEASE.
VIRGIN BLOODY KARY.

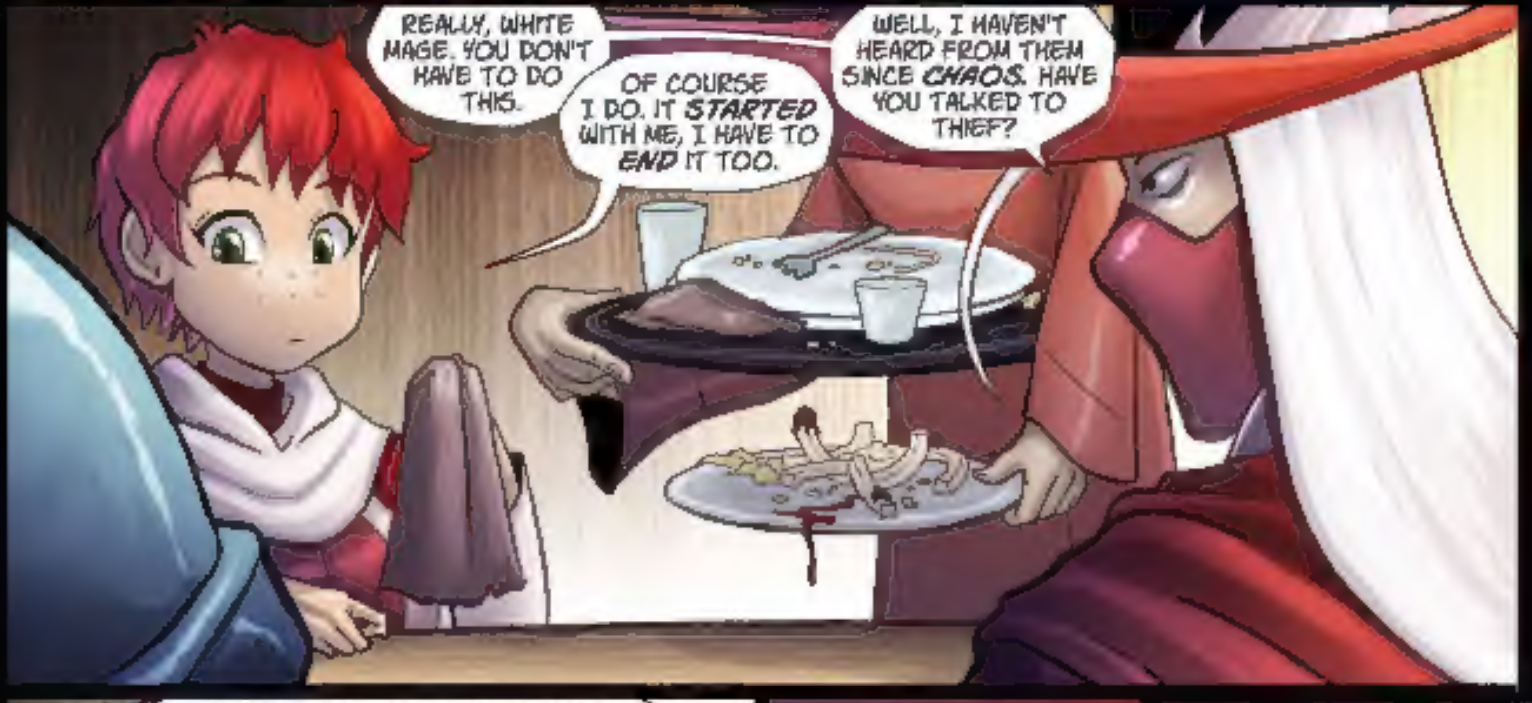
FIRST OF ALL, RED MAGE, *THANK* YOU FOR SEEING ME.
WHY WOULDN'T I?
THAT WHOLE THING WHERE I USED MY INFLUENCE WITH THE ORDER OF WHITE MAGES TO PROP UP THE DARK WARRIORS AS THE *TRUE* SAVIORS OF THE WORLD.
OH, *THAT*.

A TRIFLE. IT'S *HAVING* THE ADVENTURE THAT'S IMPORTANT, NOT WHO *KNOWS* ABOUT IT.
STILL. I'D HAVE UNDERSTOOD.
THE PAST IS PAST. BESIDES, I HAVE MY WORK NOW.
YOUR SUPPORT GROUP FOR LONE SURVIVORS OF SECRET SOCIETIES? SO, THAT'S COMING ALONG THEN?

MEMBERSHIP *DOUBLED* JUST THIS MONTH!
THAT WAS WHEN I JOINED AFTER I GOT BACK FROM THE MOON.
FULL DISCLOSURE, RECRUITMENT'S HIT A *BRICK WALL* SINCE THEN.

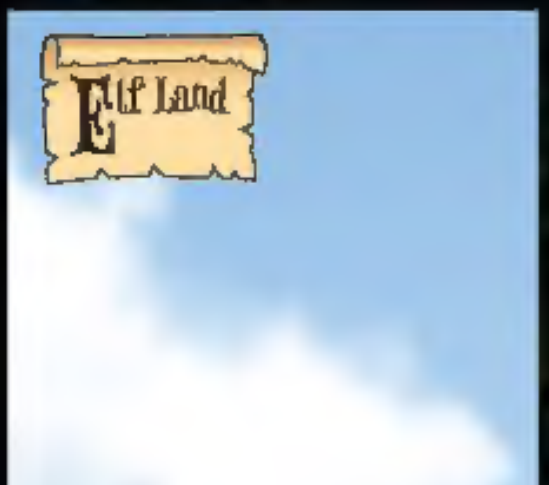
I'M NOT SURE WHY. THIS WORLD IS *TEEMING* WITH INSANE CULTS JUST *BRIMMING* OVER WITH INEVITABLY SELF-DESTRUCTIVE IDEAS. TRAGIC LONE WOLF FIGURES SHOULD BE COMING OUT OF THE WOODWORK!

I STILL SAY IT'S THE NAME.
LOOK, WE'RE SECTS BUDDIES. OKAY? THAT'S NOT GOING TO CHANGE.

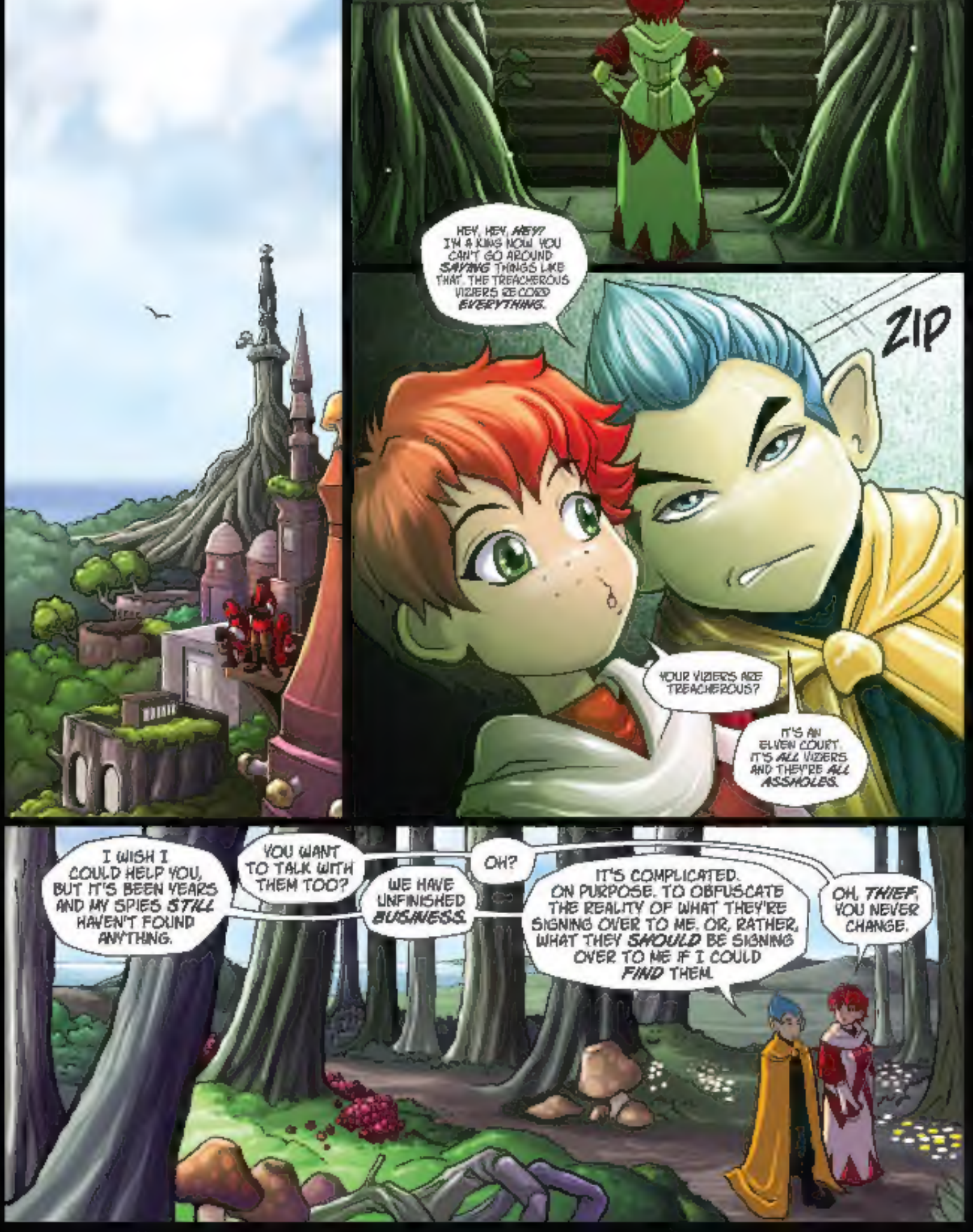

REALLY, WHITE MAGE. YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS.
OF COURSE I DO. IT *STARTED* WITH ME, I HAVE TO *END* IT TOO.
WELL, I HAVEN'T HEARD FROM THEM SINCE *CHAOS*. HAVE YOU TALKED TO THIEF?

I WASN'T SURE WHERE TO *FIND* HIM AFTER HE DISAPPEARED INTO ELF LAND. AND YOU KNOW HOW ISOLATIONIST THEY'VE BECOME SINCE THE WAR. AND THEN THE WARS AFTER *THAT*.

MY ADVICE? TRY THE PALACE.


Elf Land

YOU WILL NOT *KNEEL* BEFORE THE KING OF THE ELVEN LANDS?
THIEF. I HEALED YOUR ASS. *LITERALLY*, YOUR ACTUAL *ASS*.


HEY, HEY, HEY? I'M A KING NOW. YOU CAN'T GO AROUND SAYING THINGS LIKE THAT. THE TREACHEROUS VIZIERS RECORD EVERYTHING.
ZIP
YOUR VIZIERS ARE TREACHEROUS?
IT'S AN ELVEN COURT. IT'S ALL VIZIERS AND THEY'RE ALL ASSHOLES.
I WISH I COULD HELP YOU, BUT IT'S BEEN YEARS AND MY SPIES STILL HAVEN'T FOUND ANYTHING.
YOU WANT TO TALK WITH THEM TOO?
WE HAVE UNFINISHED BUSINESS.
OH?
IT'S COMPLICATED. ON PURPOSE. TO OBFUSCATE THE REALITY OF WHAT THEY'RE SIGNING OVER TO ME. OR, RATHER, WHAT THEY SHOULD BE SIGNING OVER TO ME IF I COULD FIND THEM.
OH, THIEF. YOU NEVER CHANGE.

WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH THEM ANYWAY? I THOUGHT YOU HATED—
I DO.
BUT THE COUNCIL OF WHITE MAGES HAS DEIGNED TO RECOGNIZE THE EFFORTS OF THE LIGHT WARRIORS WHICH, CIRCUMLOCUTIOUS THOUGH THEY WERE, LED TO THE PROPHECY BEING FULFILLED.
AND AS I BEGAN THE QUEST TO SHEPHERD YOU FOUR INTO YOUR FATE, IT IS MINE TO FINISH.
THIS DEIGNING. IS THERE GOLD IN IT?
YOU GET A PLAQUE.
GOLD PLAQUES?
NO, THIEF.
IN THAT CASE, I'LL LET YOU KNOW IF MY SPIES FIND ANYTHING.
THANK YOU.
AKBAR'S NOT USELESS TOOLS
"AFTER I GET THE SIGNATURES."
"OF COURSE."
DON'T FINE
WE'RE LOST. AGAIN!
WE'RE NOT LOST. WE JUST DON'T KNOW WHERE WE ARE, OR HOW WE GOT HERE, OR WHAT DAY IT IS, OR WHO THESE PEOPLE ARE, OR WHERE OUR MONEY IS.
OH. THAT'S COOL THEN. WHAT WAS I WORRIED ABOUT?

EXACTLY! WE'LL DO A FEW QUESTS FROM THE JOB BOARD AND BE BACK ON OUR FEET IN NO TIME!
JUDGING BY THE SMELL OF THIS PLACE, THE PRIMARY INDUSTRY APPEARS TO BE "CRAPPING IN THE STREET."
YEAH, THAT'S BEEN TAKEN.
HERE'S ONE! THEY'RE RECRUITING FOR SOMETHING CALLED SOLDIER!
LAME.
THE DUKEDOM OF DOLLET IS HIRING MERCENARIES TO REPEL GALBADIAN AGGRESSION.
SOMEHOW EVEN LAMER.
WE COULD JOIN THE SEARCH FOR A MISSING ALEXANDRIAN PRINCESS.
THAT COULD BE INTERESTING...
AH, THEY'VE ALREADY GOT A BLACK MAGE.
OH, ESCORTING A RELIGIOUS PILGRIMAGE?

I'D RATHER CHEW MY OWN NECK OFF.

WE COULD FIND A FEW OTHER ADVENTURERS AND JOIN THE FIGHT AGAINST SHADOWLORD.
WHAT'D YOU SAY?

IT'S A SPELL FOR SITTING ON MY ASS READING A BOOK FOR HOURS AT A TIME. NEXT!
EH. EVERY-THING AFTER THAT SOUNDS LIKE A WASTE OF TIME.
I COULD'VE TOLD YOU THAT.

Y'KNOW WHAT WE SHOULD DO?
OH, THIS'LL BE GOOD. WHAT? WHAT SHOULD WE DO?
WE NEVER DID FIND THAT ARMOR OF INVINCIBILITY...
The End